



1-1-1941

# An Investigation of the Present Status of the Christian Home in America

Edward Eugene Russell  
*Butler University*

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.butler.edu/grtheses>



Part of the [Religion Commons](#), and the [Sociology Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Russell, Edward Eugene, "An Investigation of the Present Status of the Christian Home in America" (1941). *Graduate Thesis Collection*. Paper 386.

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate Scholarship at Digital Commons @ Butler University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Thesis Collection by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Butler University. For more information, please contact [fgaede@butler.edu](mailto:fgaede@butler.edu).

AN INVESTIGATION OF THE PRESENT STATUS  
OF THE CHRISTIAN HOME IN AMERICA

by

EDWARD EUGENE RUSSELL

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts  
College of Religion.

Division of Graduate Instruction  
Butler University  
Indianapolis  
1941



## PREFACE

This study of the Christian home in America has been attempted because of the growing concern of the church for the welfare and progress of family life. The importance of this subject was first brought to my attention by Dr. Fredrick D. Kershner, Dean of the College of Religion of Butler University, in a course of lectures on "Christian Ethics." I acknowledge my indebtedness to Dr. Kershner for the inspiration and constructive criticism which he has given, to Dr. Leland Foster Wood of the Committee on Marriage and the Home of the Federal Council of Churches for his encouragement, and to many ministers and friends for their valuable counsel and assistance.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
INTRODUCTION .....	1
 Chapter	
I. THE RISE AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE CHRISTIAN HOME .....	6
The Jewish Background	
Christian Teachings Regarding the Home	
History after the Apostolic Age	
II. THE PRESENT STATUS OF THE CHRISTIAN HOME .....	28
Significant Statistics	
Religious Observances in the Home	
Teaching Children in the Home	
Religion in the Lives of Young People	
The Economic Status of the Home	
The Results of Christian Influence	
III. THE PROBLEM OF DIVORCE .....	50
The Divorce Problem in America	
The Causes of Divorce	
Christian Teachings Concerning Divorce	
Safeguarding Marriage	
IV. THE CHURCH PROGRAM FOR THE HOME .....	76
Planning for the Home	
Education for Christian Family Life	
The Preaching Program	
Making Marriage Impressive	
Pastoral Care	
CONCLUSION .....	100
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	104
APPENDIXES .....	107

## INTRODUCTION

The family is the basic unit of human society. It is not an artificial organization. It is a natural unit in which human beings are related by the nature of their physical and social endowments. From the beginnings of human history, the home has been the channel through which man has satisfied his basic social desires for fellowship and recognition. In the home the instinct of self-preservation has found expression. Through family relationships the perpetuation of the race has been possible.

Although conditions in home and family life naturally affect the character of other human institutions, nevertheless, wholesome family life is an end in itself. It is the door to happiness and the gateway to personal achievement. Much of the real joy and significance of human life is found in the intimate circle of family relations. Those forces which destroy the peace and stability of the home bring unhappiness and confusion to individual lives. Constructive influences which minister to the progress of the home also help to promote the general welfare of humanity.

Likewise, the home plays an important role in the advancement of civilization. It is a barometer of culture. Wherever home life is characterized by peace, unity, and high



moral standards, civilization reaches a higher stage of development. The break-up of the home is generally accompanied by the break-down of civilization.

Also, the standards and condition of home life exert a powerful influence upon the state or nation. In recent times, leaders in the field of secular education have recognized the formative influence of the home. They have said that any ideal which is needed in the life of the nation should be nurtured in the homes of the people. If the ideal becomes ingrained in the lives of children, in one generation it will bear its fruitage in national life.

Calvin Coolidge called attention to a fundamental principle of American life, when he said: "The greatest need of America is religion, a religion that centers in the home." Religion has always occupied an important place in the American family. Because the government of the United States was among the first to establish the principle of the separation of church and state, the church has been less concerned with government and politics and more interested in other unrestricted areas. As a result, the home has become the chief agency for the expression of religion. The majority of American statesmen have recognized the creative influence of religion in the home; they have also been aware of the extent to which other institutions of national life depend upon the home for their strength and effectiveness.

Whenever American family life has been imperiled by forces of decay and destruction, social and religious prophets

have arisen to defend the integrity of the home. In recent years many such leaders have been alarmed by the apparent disintegration and decline of the home. Some have appealed for the restoration of certain forms and characteristics of early American life. Typical of such appeals is the eloquent message of Dr. George Walter Fiske, who compares the home with the shrines and temples which have been restored from the ruins of ancient cities. He says:

Another precious temple is calling for restoration. It is the temple of home religion. Once it was the world's chief shrine, for "the father was God's first priest." Faith in God was born there. The prayer life found simple trustful expression there. Love for Christ and sturdy Christian character were nurtured there. But something has happened to this temple of the home. The earthquake of modern speed and efficiency has shaken it. The internal explosions of modern doubts have silenced its inner voices. The attacks of modern social competitions have left it in ruin and neglect. Alas for the temple our fathers reared! <sup>1</sup>

These words were written in 1928 by a learned and critical student of American life. Were his fears unfounded? At present does the condition of the home justify an attitude of alarm? Is the modern home unable to adjust itself to the changing conditions of social life? This dissertation should aid in the answering of these important questions.

Christianity is the chief form of religion in America. All other religious systems occupy an insignificant place in

---

<sup>1</sup> George Walter Fiske, The Changing Family, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1928), p. 3.



comparison with it. The large majority of American homes, which have definite religious affiliations, are identified with Christianity. Also, because of its more general acceptance, Christianity undoubtedly has exerted some degree of influence upon every home in America. Therefore, the failure of the American home would signify the partial failure of Christianity. If Christianity fails in the homes with which it is actively identified, how can it hope to succeed in other less related areas of life? If the church cannot minister to its own homes, how can it exert a constructive influence upon other social institutions?

During the last decade, the church has approached the problem of Christian family life with renewed interest and zeal. Both Catholic and Protestant church organizations have developed extensive programs for a more effective ministry to the home. Youth Conferences have offered courses of study and programs of action on the subject of the Christian family. More interest has been taken in the education and preparation of youth for marriage. The adult education movement within the church has placed special emphasis upon the education of parents for Christian family life. Ministers have received more training in pastoral counseling, and Christian people as a whole, have become vitally concerned with the business of building Christian homes. The success of these projects depends to a great extent upon a clear understanding of the home.

This thesis is an investigation of the present status of the Christian home in America. It should help to ascertain

the actual effect that religion is having in the home. It may help to answer the following questions: what are the most important problems of Christian family life? how are these problems being solved? does the Christian religion occupy a significant place in the home? does it help to insure the unity and permanence of the home? What is the church doing to make Christianity effective in family life? Significant answers to these questions depend upon a knowledge of the actual status of the home.

In dealing with this subject, a definition of the Christian home is of first importance. Without a clear conception of the nature and purposes of the Christian home, its status in society cannot be determined. Chapter I contains the definition of the Christian home. Chapter II contains the results of an investigation of the Christian homes of America, and Chapter IV deals with the program of the church in its relation to the home. A special section is given to the study of the problem of divorce because of its vital connection with the stability of the home.

In this study the inductive method of research has been followed as closely as possible, in order to allow an unbiased appraisal of the facts which are presented. If a deeper appreciation of the Christian home, a more sympathetic understanding of its problems, and a more effective program for its development should result from this study, then the church may proceed with greater enthusiasm and confidence to increase its ministry in "the temple of home religion."

## CHAPTER I

### THE RISE AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE CHRISTIAN HOME

In order to determine accurately the present status of the Christian home in America, a clear concept of the character and content of Christian family life is necessary. What is the Christian home? What constitutes Christian family life? In what respects is the Christian home a distinctive institution? The answers to these questions are prerequisite to a proper evaluation of the status of the home in modern society.

The origin of the Christian home may be dated in the first century A.D.. The Christian family came into existence as the spirit and teachings of Jesus began to be applied to the relationships and problems of the home. Jesus and His apostles set forth the general principles of purity, forbearance, and good will which had an indirect effect upon the home. They also gave some definite teachings upon the subjects of marriage, divorce, and family life. Christian disciples accepted these teachings and applied them in their family relations.

However, the teachings of Jesus were projected upon a background of Jewish cultural life. Their significance can be more clearly understood through a knowledge of the



social life and customs of the Hebrew people. As a knowledge of the Old Testament is essential to an understanding of the New Testament, a study of Jewish family life is necessary to an adequate analysis of the Christian idea of the home.

### The Jewish Background

The family was one of the most important units in the life of the Hebrew people. The early history of the nation was largely written in terms of family life. The events of history were woven around the characters of Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Saul, and David and the deeds and exploits of their families. A study of Hebrew history reveals three outstanding characteristics of their family life which are closely connected with the Christian idea of the family, namely: the monogamous ideal of marriage, the value of family loyalties and affections, and the concept of the home as the primary agency for the teaching of religion.

First, the monogamous ideal of marriage is set forth by the writer of Genesis who conceives of the family as a divine institution, made up of the divinely created man and woman, and joined together by the Creator.<sup>1</sup> Evidently monogamy was only an ideal, for no specific legislation is found in the writings of the Old Testament to enforce this type of marriage.

---

<sup>1</sup> Gen. 2:24

In fact, there is abundant evidence to show that other types were prevalent, such as polygamy and the "beena" marriages,"in which the man enters the family of the woman and becomes incorporated into her tribe, and the children are reckoned as being of the woman's tribe."<sup>1</sup> Polygamy seems to have been the most common type of marriage, and the number of wives that a man might have seems only to have been limited by economic considerations. However, during the time of Christ monogamy appears to have been recognized as the ideal, and Jesus himself assumed it as the perfect standard.<sup>2</sup>

Second, family loyalties were intense and enduring among the Hebrew people, and respect and reverence of children for their parents were codified in one of the great commandments upon which Jewish national life was founded.<sup>3</sup> To enforce family loyalties certain laws were passed. For example, the "goel" or "redeemer" was encouraged to "redeem" or buy back a relative who had been forced into slavery because of poverty.<sup>4</sup> Likewise, whenever a man died, leaving a dependent wife, it became the duty of the man's nearest kinsman to marry and provide for the woman.<sup>5</sup> This idea is well illustrated in the story of Ruth. Concerning this idea of family loyalty, Dr. Sherrill says:

---

<sup>1</sup> Lewis Joseph Sherrill, Family and Church, (New York: Abingdon Press, 1937), p. 104.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. 19:3f.

<sup>3</sup> Ex. 20:12.

<sup>4</sup> Lev. 25:47f.

<sup>5</sup> Gen. 38:8, Ruth.



The Hebrews were intensely aware of kinship. The family and its bonds were life itself to them, and they took great pains to keep family consciousness alive. The long genealogies in the Bible, dry and tedious to us, were a priceless possession to many. And Hebrew ideas of justice were deeply colored by the obligations which a kinsman owed to another member of his family.<sup>1</sup>

Third, the conception that the family should be the primary source and agency for religious training is evident from a study of Jewish customs. Perhaps this was due to the fact that schools outside the family were not well known until the close of the Old Testament period. Parents constantly were urged to teach their children the history and traditions of the race.<sup>2</sup> The many feasts and religious celebrations offered excellent opportunities for the father to impress upon his children the outstanding events of national history, and parents were urged to take advantage of these special days.<sup>3</sup> Dr. Sherrill summarizes the responsibility of the family as a primary teaching agent by saying:

In the Biblical idea it is primarily the parent who is to be educated by the church, and the parent in turn is to educate the child.<sup>4</sup>

This idea of parental responsibility was evidently carried over into the Church of the Christian era from the background of early Hebrew family life.

<sup>1</sup> Lewis Joseph Sherrill, Family and Church, (New York: Abingdon Press, 1937), p. 69.

<sup>2</sup> Deut. 4:9, 10.

<sup>3</sup> Ex. 12: 26, 27.

<sup>4</sup> Lewis Joseph Sherrill, Family and Church, (New York: Abingdon Press, 1937), p. 87.

Descriptions of the home life of the Hebrew people during the days of Jesus are naturally difficult to reconstruct.

Dr. Edersheim provides a few illuminating sentences, as follows:

From the very first days of its existence, a religious atmosphere surrounded the child of Jewish parents. Admitted in the number of God's chosen people by the significant rite of circumcision, when its name was first spoken in the accents of prayer, it was henceforth separated unto God...The first education was necessarily the mother's....There could not be national history, nor even romance, to compare with that by which a Jewish mother might hold her child entranced. Long before he could go to school, or even Synagogue, the private and united prayers and the domestic rites, would indelibly impress themselves upon his mind. The father was bound to teach his son. To impart to the child a knowledge of the Torah conferred as great spiritual distinction, as if a man had received the Law itself on Mount Horeb...That man was of the profane vulgar, who had sons, but failed to bring them up in knowledge of the Law...In all probability, however, there was a Synagogue School in Nazareth and, if so, the Child-Saviour would conform to the general practice of attendance. That His was pre-eminently a pious home in the highest sense, it seems almost irreverent to say. From His intimate familiarity with Holy Scripture, in its every detail, we may be allowed to infer that the home of Nazareth, however humble, possessed a precious copy of the sacred volume in its entirety.<sup>1</sup>

Out of this atmosphere Jesus came from His carpenter home in Nazareth to be immersed by John the Baptist and to begin the short career of His earthly ministry. Upon this background of Jewish family life, He projected His teachings regarding the home. To properly evaluate His teachings, we must keep in mind the three dominant characteristics of Jewish home life. These character-

---

<sup>1</sup> Rev. Alfred Edersheim, The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1903), I, P. 227f.



ristics may be summarized as follows: first, there was the gradually developing ideal of the monogamous marriage, the union of one man and one woman; second, the family was the most important unit of Jewish life, and family loyalties were intense and far-reaching; third, the home was considered the primary agency for religious instruction.

#### Christian Teachings Regarding The Home

When we examine the teachings of Jesus, we are struck at once by the extraordinary emphasis which he laid repeatedly on the institution of the family. There were many problems concerning which the judgment of Jesus was sought by both His enemies and His friends. On some of these important problems He seemed to have very little to say. Toward the questions of politics, government, war, and even toward the main theological issues of His time, we notice extraordinary reserve, and in some cases complete silence. Therefore, it is surprising to find that the teachings of Jesus deal with the nature and obligations of family life in an unparalleled fullness of detail.

Not only does Jesus answer all the questions which are asked Him concerning the family, but also he uses the phraseology of home and family life to express the most important doctrines of His religion. Dr. Francis Peabody rightfully says:

His entire theology may be described as a transfiguration of the family, God is a father, man is his child; and from the father to the child there is conveyed the precious and patient message of paternal love. When the prodigal boy, in

that parable which most perfectly tells the story of the sinning and repentant life, "came to himself," his first words were, "I will arise and go to my father;" and while he is yet afar off the waiting father sees him coming and is moved with compassion. Repentance, that is to say, is but the homesickness of the soul, and the uninterrupted and watching care of the parent is the fairest earthly type of the unfailing forgiveness of God. The family is, to the mind of Jesus, the nearest of human analogies to that divine order which it was his mission to reveal.<sup>1</sup>

Many other words and phrases from home and family life have found their way into Christian thinking. For example, heaven is often referred to as the "Home" in the life everlasting; the church is referred to in the writings of the apostle Paul as the "family of God;" <sup>2</sup> believers in Christ are called "children of God;" <sup>3</sup> the church is also described in the writings of the apostles as the "Bride of Christ;"<sup>4</sup> Jesus is pictured as the bridegroom; <sup>5</sup> and the final union of Christ with his church is pictured in terms of "the marriage of the lamb"; <sup>6</sup> in fact, Jesus refers to himself as the "bridegroom";<sup>7</sup> and the Christians in the New Testament are often called "brethren."<sup>8</sup>

These words have come down from the first century to the present day, and they are commonly used to describe some of the

---

<sup>1</sup> Francis Peabody, Jesus Christ and the Social Question, (New York; the Macmillan Co., 1920), p. 147.

<sup>2</sup> Eph. 3:15.

<sup>3</sup> John 1:12.

<sup>4</sup> Rev. Chap. 19, 20, 21

<sup>5</sup> Rev. 21:9.

<sup>6</sup> Rev. 19:7

<sup>7</sup> Matt. 9:15, 25:1-10.

<sup>8</sup> Rom. 9:3, Col. 1:2.



most essential elements of the Christian religion. Thus it can be seen why the success and integrity of the home is necessary to the progress of the Christian faith. The phraseology of the home has become one of the main vehicles for the expression of Christ's most vital doctrines. All influences which degrade family relationships, so that they lose their high moral and spiritual significance, are bound to detract from the ideology, and, in the main, to nullify the efforts of the church in its ministry and message. How can the idea of the fatherhood of God convey its full Christian significance to the children of fathers who are irresponsible, immoral, and irreligious? How can the church be the family of God to people whose family life is full of strife and discord? The significance of many vital Christian ideas is predicated upon the integrity and stability of wholesome family life. Jesus and the apostles must have had a profound regard for the affections of family life to allow its phraseology to so color their most important teachings concerning God and His dealings with men.

However the high ideals of Christian family life do not rest entirely upon incidental inferences which may be drawn from the Christian scriptures. There are many passages in the New Testament which deal in full detail with the nature and obligations of Christian family life.

First, the New Testament teaches that marriage is a sacred, permanent, and monogamous relationship, which recognizes not only the physical affections of human beings but also the divine purposes of God. These elements may be observed in the reply of Jesus to the Pharisees, who tested him by asking: "Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?" Jesus answered:

Have ye not read, that he who made them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh? So that they are no more two, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. <sup>1</sup>

When Jesus was further questioned about the bill of divorcement which Moses commanded that men should give to their wives, he replied:

Moses for the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives; but from the beginning it hath not been so. <sup>2</sup>

In the latter statement Jesus teaches that marriage was intended by the Creator to be a permanent, monogamous relationship, rather than a temporary agreement. In other words, men were not to contemplate putting away their wives. In all Jesus' teachings about marriage this idea is emphasized. All passages, in which Jesus deals with the subject, contain the idea of this sentence in the Gospel of Matthew.

---

<sup>1</sup> Matt. 19:3f.  
<sup>2</sup> Matt. 19:3f.



Whosoever shall put away his wife, except for the cause of fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery. <sup>1</sup>

In other words, Jesus makes a special protest against the idea of thinking of marriage as a temporary and convenient agreement. Marriage is to be thought of as a permanent, indissoluble union. He is asked about the "causes", or reasons, for which a man should put away his wife: he replies that a man should not put away his wife for any cause, with the possible exception of the cause of fornication. <sup>2</sup> In reality, the emphasis of Jesus is not upon the causes of separation; it is upon the basic ideal of permanency in marriage. Remarriage is not to be anticipated because marriage is permanent.

In these teachings regarding marriage, Jesus was upholding, in no uncertain language, the divine ideal of a permanent, monogamous union which should be dissolved, with one exception, only in the case of death. Whether or not Jesus expected all men to attain this ideal, one thing is certain, all followers of Jesus should be acquainted with it and should strive for its attainment. Concerning this ideal Professor Peabody says:

---

<sup>1</sup> Matt. 19:3f.

<sup>2</sup> Neither the Gospels of Mark or Luke contain the "fornication clause". Some New Testament authorities consider it to be an interpolation.

Thus the teachings of Jesus was too uncompromising for the indulgent aristocracy of Rome, and too unmistakable for the subtle theologians of Jerusalem. Indeed, it was the more an offense to both because both were forced to recognize that it was the ideal from which they had fallen away. The family is, to Jesus, not a temporary arrangement at the mercy of uncontrolled temper or shifting desire; it is ordained for that very discipline in forbearance and self restraint which are precisely what many persons would avoid, and the easy rupture of its union blights these virtues in their bud. Why should one concern himself in marriage to be considerate and forgiving if it is easier to be divorced than it is to be good? <sup>1</sup>

The writings of the apostle Paul also uphold the absolute ideal of marriage as a sacred and permanent relationship. The following scriptures are quoted as most pertinent to the subject:

But because of fornications, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband. <sup>2</sup>

But unto the married I give charge, yea not I but the Lord, that the wife depart not from her husband (but should she depart, let her remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband); and that the husband leave not his wife. <sup>3</sup>

A wife is bound for so long time as her husband liveth; but if the husband is dead, she is free to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord. <sup>4</sup>

Husbands love your wives, even as Christ also loved His Church, and gave himself for it. <sup>5</sup>

These first three scriptures emphasize the permanency of marriage; the last speaks of the sanctity of the relation by compar-

<sup>1</sup> Peabody, op. cit., p. 159.

<sup>2</sup> I Cor. 7:2.

<sup>3</sup> I Cor. 7:10, 11.

<sup>4</sup> I Cor. 7:39.

<sup>5</sup> Eph. 5:25.



ing the union of husband and wife to the union of Christ and His church. The affections of the Christian family are to be modeled after Christ's holy love for His church, and it is not amiss to say that the Christian family is to be a living example to the world of Christ's love for the church. Professor Holt correctly defines the purpose of the Christian family, by saying:

In all types of marriage, with the exception of the romantic, family life exists for something larger than itself. In the Oriental marriage it exists for the continuity and glory of the ancestral group; in the conventional marriage it exists for the glory of the class; in some European countries it exists for the glory of the state. In Christianity, however, the family exists for God, interpreted by the church.<sup>1</sup>

Second, the New Testament also contains some specific instructions in regard to the obligations of husbands and wives and parents and children in the home. The apostle Paul writes:

Wives be in subjection to your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, being himself the savior of the body. But as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives also be to their husbands in everything.<sup>2</sup>

Wives be in subjection to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and be not bitter against them.<sup>3</sup>

Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honor thy father and mother (which is the first commandment with promise), that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth. And ye fathers, provoke

---

<sup>1</sup> Arthur K. Holt, Professor of Social Ethics, Chicago Theological Seminary, The Fate of the Family in the Modern World, (Willett, Clark & Co., Chicago., 1936) p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Eph. 5:22.

<sup>3</sup> Col. 3:18.

not your children to wrath: but nurture them in the chastening and admonition of the Lord. <sup>1</sup>

Fathers, provoke not your children, that they be not discouraged. <sup>2</sup>

All of these teachings furnish a clear conception of the simple, yet fundamental principles which should characterize Christian family life.

Some New Testament scholars suggest that these teachings unduly elevate the husband and father to a position of authority and dominance, and that they likewise relegate the wife to a position of inferiority. The inferior status of women cannot possibly be implied in these teachings, for the very fact that the wife is urged to "be in subjection to the husband" suggests that, rightfully, she is on a basis of equality with him. If inferiority were implied, the admonition would be pointless. In fact, the teachings, both of the apostle Paul and of Jesus, seem to elevate the status of woman to a position of equality with man. Jesus' ideal of marriage places both man and woman upon the same level. His ideal does not allow a woman to be treated as a slave or chattel and man is dispossessed of the right to put away his wife for any cause by giving her a bill of divorcement. According to the teachings of Paul it is inconceivable that any woman would resent being in subjection to a husband who would love her as Christ

---

<sup>1</sup>Eph. 6:1-4.  
<sup>2</sup>Col. 3:21.



loved the church.

In regard to the question of the equality of the sexes, the teachings of Christianity are summarized appropriately in these words:

Christianity gave a new status to the woman and to the family. Christ brought his Gospel to all human beings without any difference of race or sex. The apostle Paul wrote to the Galatians: "There is neither bond or free, there is neither male or female; for ye are one in Christ Jesus." Now the woman could no longer be treated as a slave or an animal. ...Christianity had to overcome the tendency toward asceticism. Christianity gradually cultivated the sexual morality of men. It postulated that man has to live a monogamous life. Marriage and the family achieved a new dignity by this equality of sexual morality, and by the elevation of matrimony to a sacrament.<sup>1</sup>

From the scriptures previously listed, it is evident that Christianity presents a realistic attitude toward the question of the physical relationship of husband and wife in the Christian family. It is interesting to note that the high strain of exalted idealism in Jesus concerning marriage is not inconsistent with an equally remarkable quality of sanity and common sense. Jesus refers to the fact that "He which made them, made them, male and female", and "the two shall become one flesh".<sup>2</sup> Jesus is no feeble mystic or ascetic visionary who thought of marriage only in terms of spiritual affinity. He

---

<sup>1</sup>Rev. A. S. Nash, Education for Christian Marriage, (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1940), p. 200.

<sup>2</sup>Matt. 19:3f.

recognized both the physical and spiritual nature of the marriage relation. When questioned by the Sadducees as to what would happen to his strict doctrine of the marriage tie "in the resurrection", when a woman might find herself among many legitimate claimants, Jesus replies that marriage is based on physical conditions which are not to be characteristic of life in the world beyond. "In the resurrection", He says, "they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels in heaven." <sup>1</sup> Those who contend that there is something sensually base in sexual intercourse, and upon this contention uphold the superior morality of celibacy and virginity, wholly misconstrue the general teachings of the New Testament. Indeed, it is true that the apostle Paul expressed some ideas from which this position might be inferred. However, in their entirety, his views are consistent with those of Jesus. Neither suggest that there is anything essentially evil about physical affections; both urge fidelity in marriage, continence out of marriage, and in all conditions a high regard for the spiritual purposes of life.

Concerning the obligations of parents and children in the home, New Testament Christianity teaches mutual responsibility and the attitudes of reverence and respect. Parents are to be considerate with their children, respecting their personal growth, "that they be not discouraged", <sup>2</sup> and children,

---

<sup>1</sup> Matt. 28:30

<sup>2</sup> Col. 3:21.



in turn, are to honor and obey their parents. Both of these principles make for happy home life.

Likewise parents are to nurture their children "in the chastening and admonition of the Lord".<sup>1</sup> No detailed references are made as to the methods and content of the Christian education of children and young people, but, because of the rich tradition of Jewish family life upon which the Christian home is projected, it may be inferred that religious instruction occupied an important place in the Christian family. The fact that the early church, especially in New Testament times, had no church building, but held their assemblies in the homes of the members, suggests that the home was the first center of Christian instruction and fellowship. In the New Testament a few references are made to "the church in thy house".<sup>2</sup> We may infer that the children and parents of various families met in a close fellowship for prayer, instruction, and participation in the Lord's supper. Thus the home became the first center of the institutional life of Christianity. Undoubtedly the Jewish conception of the home as the primary teaching agency was carried over into Christian family life. The apostles seemed to place great emphasis upon study of the scriptures,<sup>3</sup> and a knowledge of the doctrinal content of the new faith.<sup>4</sup> It may be naturally

---

<sup>1</sup> Eph. 6:4

<sup>2</sup> Ro. 16:5, Col. 4:15, Phil. 1:2.

<sup>3</sup> II Tim. 2:15, 3:16.

<sup>4</sup> Acts 2:42

and logically inferred that devout people would teach their children the cardinal doctrines and meanings of their faith and practice.

The picture of the Christian home which is presented in the New Testament scriptures may be summarized as follows: first, the home is a highly important unit of civilization, in which the Lord himself is especially interested, and He uses its terminology to express the essential doctrines of His revelation; second, the home is based upon the permanent, monogamous union of one man and one woman, a union which is divine in its origin and purposes, and a union which is dissoluble only for the causes of marital unfaithfulness or death; third, in the Christian home, the status of woman is elevated to a position of equality with man, and husband and wife are partners in the common experiences of life; fourth, in the Christian family, physical affections and the physical union of husband and wife are realistically considered as a part of the spiritual union which it is the office of marriage to secure; finally, in the Christian home, parents and children assume their various responsibilities and mutual attitudes of respect and reverence. Concerning the economic necessities and the material accruements of the home, no complete picture is given. We know, however, from a study of the New Testament, that some of the homes were wealthy and some were poor. All Christian homes were to exist and to be administered for the glory of God and His church. The con-



tinuance of the Christian home is one of the essential necessities in the building of a Christian civilization.

### History After the Apostolic Age

Only a few references from history are needed to trace the development of the Christian home after the Apostolic Age. The main essentials of the home have been continued until the present day. At least, the ideal set forth in the New Testament has remained as the norm of the home, and the tendency of the church to habitually revert to the New Testament, as its only rule of faith and practice, Perversions of Christian teachings have often imperiled the existence of the Christian home. A study of the development of the home brings to our attention many of these conflicts.

First, during the time of the early church fathers, we find a strong recurrence of the ascetic ideal and the tendency to think of the physical aspects of marriage as sensually base. Dr. Alban Widgery calls attention to the fact that "there has been much praise of celibacy in Christian history".<sup>1</sup> He records that: "Ignatius, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Cyprian, Jerome, Gregory of Nazianzen, and Augustine emphasized the ascetic virtues of celibacy and virginity as greater than marriage".<sup>2</sup>

The argument may be advanced that in this respect the Church Fathers were following the example of Jesus and Paul.

---

<sup>1</sup>Alban Widgery, Christian Ethics in History and Modern Life, (New York: Round Table Press, 1940), p. 214

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 215.

Indeed, the ascetic ideal finds some support in their teaching regarding marriage, and, especially in their example. However, very few Christian scholars or authorities would advance the idea that an ethical system can be fairly constructed solely upon the examples of the founders of religions, or upon excerpts from their teachings. All teachings which are related to a given subject must be considered, together with the express mission and purpose of the founders. We can only conclude that the early Church Fathers have erred in this respect, and that their attitudes may have been colored to some extent by the pagan immoralities and philosophies of their time.

Second, during the Middle Ages we find that the Christian teachings regarding the physical aspects of marriage were opposed and misunderstood. Dr. Widgery again states:

The view that virginity and the celibate life are nearer the ideal than marriage was a feature of the whole history of monasticism. The council of Trent (1563), Canon X, reads: 'If any saith that the marriage state is to be placed above the state of virginity and celibacy... let him be anathema.' It may be presumed that this remains the official attitude of that church today.<sup>1</sup>

The reason for this negative attitude toward the physical aspects of marriage may be traced to the philosophy of monasticism which made a sharp distinction between the material and spiritual phases of life. All material things were considered inherently evil. Self-denial and self-abase-

---

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 218.



ment were emphasized to the exclusion of the Christian philosophy of self-realization. The Monastics considered all physical appetites and natural desires to be the temptations of the evil one. They possessed a strong conviction that sexual intercourse **was** sensually base and evil. Dr. Widgery says:

Viewing the actual history of Christian ethics one cannot escape from the impression that the alleged superiority of celibacy rests on an implied feeling or conviction, even when not expressed, that there is something sensually base in sex-intercourse. ..A modern Christian ethics may adopt quite the contrary attitude of regarding the sex relationship as not base but of intrinsic worth.<sup>1</sup>

During the days of the Protestant Reformation the exalted idea of the superiority of celibacy and virginity was vigorously condemned. The reformers returned to the more sane and Christian point of view in regard to the physical aspects of marriage.

However, in spite of these conflicting attitudes, the family life of the Middle Ages seemed to enjoy a normal growth and development. Perhaps this was true because the fathers and mothers took the advice of the learned theologians with the proverbial "grain of salt". At least, sound Christian attitudes seem to have prevailed in many families of the more highly civilized states. One survey of Christian history says:

The development of medieval civilization, together with Christianity, gave a higher meaning to the family.

---

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 223.

It turned the obedient slave into a loyal wife, the powerful lord into a loving father.<sup>1</sup>

From the time of the Protestant Reformation until the present the conditions of family life have been influenced by many important changes. The rise of industrialism, the growth of cities, the development of science and the spread of secular education have exerted a tremendous influence on the character of the modern home. During this period the churches have likewise increased in number, and the influence of Christianity has become more widespread. However, the essential characteristics of the Christian home, and the principles upon which it depends for its stability and integrity, have remained the same. The changes which have come into Christian homes have been changes in its external form rather than in its actual character.

In conclusion, we may define the Christian home of today as that home in which the members of the family are consciously endeavoring to follow the teachings of Christ and to live the Christian life. It is a home in which there is a knowledge of, and a respect for, the Christian ideals of love, marriage, and family relations. It is a home which "expects to have its friction of interests and its moments of turbulence, like a stream that has its rapids and falls; but these incidents do not block the movement of life, and

---

<sup>1</sup>Nash, pp. cit., p. 202.

the stream of love grows deeper and more tranquil as it flows. It has its troubles, and they draw hearts together. It has its joys and they are multiplied by being shared." <sup>1</sup>  
 One of the finest definitions of the Christian family in modern literature is given by Dr. Francis Peabody. He concludes his definition by saying:

When, finally, the children grow up to hear the larger truths, - truths of the kingdom and of the father in heaven, and of the son for whose return the father is waiting, - then they interpret these great mysteries of the eternal world, as Jesus prompted them to do, in the language of their own loving and united home. Are there many such Christian families? Millions, we confidently answer. This is the normal type of the civilized home. The teaching of Jesus, so slightly accepted in many ways of life, has actually taken firm root in the soil of the family. <sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Peabody, op. cit. , p. 181.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 181, 182.



## CHAPTER II

### THE PRESENT STATUS OF THE CHRISTIAN HOME IN AMERICA

The Christian religion has been a dominant factor in the development of American life. Its influence has extended into many areas of thought and activity. The principle of the separation of church and state has left the church free and unrestricted in its service to the institutions of democracy. The church has fostered education. It has encouraged respect for state and federal government. It has taught obedience to the laws of the land. In turn, the government has respected the rights and functions of the church. Democratic ideals have looked to the church for their support, and the government has encouraged the progress of religion.

The home is one of the many institutions of American life which reflects the influence of Christianity, but the extent to which Christian principles have taken root in the fertile soil of family life is difficult to determine. Not all American homes are Christian. Perhaps the majority are not directly and actively identified with any system of religion. But because Christianity far exceeds all other religions in America in the number of its adherents, we may infer that all American homes have been affected directly or indirectly by its influence.

### Significant Statistics

The following statistics are essential to an understanding of the status of the Christian home in America:

- (1) Total number of families in the United States--29,904,663.
- (2) 14,002,074 of these families own their own homes.
- (3) 15,319,817 of these families are tenants.
- (4) 17,372,524 families live in urban territory.
- (5) 12,532,139 families live in rural territory.
- (6) Total number of dwellings in the United States--25,204,139.
- (7) 22,833,110 of these dwellings are one-family homes.<sup>1</sup>

Three significant facts are revealed by the above figures, which have a direct bearing upon American home life. First, there are one million more tenant families in the United States than home-owning families. From this fact we may infer that more than one-half of the American people lack either the economic resources or the desire to own their homes. Second, the percentage of difference between urban and rural homes is not sufficient to cause extraordinary

---

<sup>1</sup>The World Almanac and Book of Facts (Published by the New York World Telegram, 1941).

alarm over conditions arising out of an over-balanced concentration of families in the cities. Third, there is a suggestion in items numbered six and seven that many American families are inadequately housed. However, more definite statistics are available on this subject.

The average size of the American family also has a direct relation to the question of religion in the home. The Department of Commerce, Bureau of Census, gives the following figures on the size of the modern family:<sup>1</sup>

- (1) 44.2% of all American families number--2 to 3 persons.
- (2) 17.5% of all American families number--4
- (3) 12% of all American families number--5

The average size of all American families is listed as 3.67 persons per family. The family has steadily decreased in size since the middle of the nineteenth century. Dr. Hornell Hart summarizes his studies in this field by saying:

Our births per 1,000 of population have dropped steadily from 25.1 in the year 1915 to 17.1 in 1932--a drop of almost one-third in 17 years. Swift recent decline in birth rates is clearly a general phenomenon in the Euro-American civilization.<sup>2</sup>

Studies in this field also show that the smaller families exist among the higher professional and cultural groups.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>United States Statistical Abstract (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1939).

<sup>2</sup>Hornell Hart and Ella B. Hart, Personality and the family, (Boston: D.C. Heath & Company, 1935) p. 324.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 328f.



This presents a problem of special significance to those who are interested in the future welfare of the American home.

No statistics are available on the number of Christian families in the United States, but the number can be deduced from other facts. From the religious census of 1936 we may estimate that there are approximately 11,600,000 families in the United States which have definite religious affiliations with either Catholic or Protestant church groups. This is approximately 40% of the entire population. The religious census reports that these were in 1936: "256 Religious Bodies with 199,302 organizations and 55,807,346 members. Of this total number there are 3,728 Jewish congregations, with a total membership of 4,641,184. Roman Catholics adherents have 18,409 churches, and a total membership of 19,914,937."<sup>1</sup> The Protestant population number approximately 30,000,000. Of approximately 11,600,000 families which are affiliated with some form of the Christian religion, approximately 35%, or 4,060,000 families, are connected with the Roman Catholic church, and approximately 63%, or 7,000,000 families are connected with some Protestant group.

These statistics help us to understand the general status and the comparative extent of the Christian home in

---

<sup>1</sup>Census of Religious Bodies, (Bureau of Census, Washington, D.C., 1936).

American. We may now turn to a more detailed investigation of the various phases of Christian family life, which are examined in the following order: first, religious observances in the home; second, the religious instruction of children in the home; third, the place of religion in the lives of young people; fourth, the economic status of the Christian home and its effects upon family life; fifth, the results of Christian influence in the home.

#### Religious Observances in the Home

One of the most apparent results of the changing social conditions of the past few decades in the loss of family unity and coherence. The home is no longer the center of society that it once was. Caught in the currents of rapidly changing economic and social processes, the home has lost many important functions; economic, educational, recreational, and religious. Home life no longer has the chief claim on the activities of the various members of the family. Schools, clubs, lodges, churches, and recreational centers now claim the major portion of the leisure hours of both young people and adults. As a result, the unity of the home is imperiled and the sphere of its influence is greatly reduced.

Because of this decentralization of home life, family worship is almost a thing of the past. In many families there is no time during the entire day when all members are together. The idea of the family altar, as it has been described in the past, when the father would gather his family around the hearth



and lead in an hour of scripture reading, prayer, and family devotions, is practically a modern impossibility. One minister has said: "Fifty years ago it was an exception to find a Christian home without family worship." Today, Christian ministers more often say that it is an exception to find a Christian home which has a definite plan of family worship. Of course, the form of family worship is not nearly so important as the fact. Forms may change. Similiar values may be achieved through the use of widely different forms. To what extent does family worship exist in the modern Christian home?

In 1930 an extended survey was made of religious observances in the families of white, American-born school children in various parts of the United States. It was found that:

In rural areas 85% of the children went to church with their families during the month preceding the study, while in the large cities only 40% went together to church. Grace at meals was the practice in 38% of the families in the rural areas and in 30% in the large cities. Family reading of the Bible was engaged in among 22 percent of the rural children and among 10 percent of those in the cities. One-eighth of the children in both groups came from homes which had family prayers.<sup>1</sup>

In another survey which was made in 1935 by Dr. Walter A. Maier, a Lutheran minister, one hundred and fifty typical congregations of the Lutheran church in various parts of the country were investigated. The question was asked: "Do you

---

<sup>1</sup> Hart, op.cit., p. 296.



have family devotions in your home? Dr. Maier says:

Of the thousands who submitted information, sixty percent admitted that the Bible was not read regularly in the family circle and that family prayers were never uttered in their home and environment.<sup>1</sup>

When we consider the fact that the Lutheran church always placed a strong emphasis upon the family altar and devotion in the home, the results of this survey are highly significant. Dr. Maier observes:

The reality of family worship is far removed from our America of today.<sup>2</sup>

However, the decline of the more extensive forms of family worship, as represented by the family altar, does not mean that the Christian home is entirely devoid of religious observances. Other forms of family devotion are receiving greater emphasis, such as the habits of regular grace at meals, personal devotional readings, and family discussions of religious topics. There are abundant resources of material available in these various fields, and the church is encouraging many families to incorporate these functions as a new and practical method of family devotions. The value received from these practices should be able to more than offset the decline of the old family altar.

#### Teaching Children in the Home

One of the most encouraging indications of the vitality of religion is the new emphasis that is being placed upon the function of teaching religion to children in the home. To

---

<sup>1</sup>Walter A. Maier, For Better Not For Worse, (St. Louis Concordia Publishing House, 1936) p 522.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 520.

a large extent this emphasis should help to conserve the better values of the family altar. In this new process of religious instruction less attention is being given to the formal methods of teaching. More emphasis is being placed upon the moral attitudes and habits of reverence and devotion which may be inculcated in the lives of children and youth through the examples of their parents.

For many years the church has emphasized one of the principles that the findings of science have just begun to reveal, namely, the importance of the early formative years of a child's life. The Social Work Year Book calls attention to the fact that,

Findings coming from the newer dynamic psychology and sociology, from the practice of psychiatry and social work, from the studies of child development, and from the field of parent education reveal that human personality is not fixed at birth but is largely molded by life experience, especially in the early years. ....In the process of molding the personality of the child the family plays a primary role in transmitting to him the social heritage of the race, and in putting upon him the impress of its own particular cultural concepts and patterns. His ideas about life, his beliefs, his loyalties, his prejudices, his ideals, and what he regards as accepted ways of doing things reflect the culture as exemplified and interpreted in his family.<sup>1</sup>

Thus the family occupies a key position in the cultural development of the community, and, according to these new scientific findings, the elements which are put into the lives of children will be revealed in the cultural life of the nation.

---

<sup>1</sup> Social Work Year Book, 1941, p.199.



The importance of the home as an agent for religious education is appropriately expressed in the following words:

The most important training ground for religious education and character development is the home. All available data points to the conclusions that the first five or six years of a child's life constitutes the most important period in the formation of his character, his ideals, and his attitudes: that the influence of the parents in forming the child's ideas of right and wrong completely over-shadows that of his teacher, club leader, or Sunday School teacher; that the work of these agencies can be thoroughly nullified by the counteracting influences of a poor home; and that the physical and mental habits formed in childhood are a more effective control of conduct than all the moral teaching in the world. Archimedes, a famous Greek scientist, boasted: "Give me a place to stand and I will move the earth." The modern educator says: "Give me the home and I will rebuild society." <sup>1</sup>

The example of parents is of supreme importance in teaching religion to children in the home. When parents express in their home life attitudes of reverence and respect for God, for Christ, for the Bible and the church, children are more apt to develop Christian loyalties. The church is beginning to put more emphasis upon this vital process. In a most recent book published under the auspices of the Moral Welfare Council of the church of England this principle is stressed as follows:

It is the parent's actions and character which influence their children. The idea which the child will first form of God will be his unconscious conception of his father or his mother or a composite idea of both. Remembering this, we realize that the teaching of religious ideas to small children is impossible except through our own character and behavior, which is more important than wordy expressions. <sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Moses Jung, Editor, Modern Marriage, (New York: F.S. Crofts & Co., 1940), p.336.

<sup>2</sup> A.S. Nash, editor, Education For Christian Marriage (New York: Macmillan Co., 1940), p. 129.



Not only is teaching by example more important than wordy expressions, but also it is much more difficult. Perhaps this emphasis will be a worthy substitute for the family altar and an aid in revitalizing religion in general. For, according to this principle, both children and parents will have to consider themselves partners in the creative adventure of sharing religion in the home, and although the forms of family devotion may be less extensive, the product should be more genuine.

#### Religion in the Lives of Young People

For those who are especially concerned about the declining prestige of the church and waning influence of traditional religion, an investigation of the place of religion in the life of modern youth is most revealing. Such an investigation shows that religion has a vital place in the lives of young people and that the religious home still exerts a powerful influence. The American Council of Education has recently conducted a survey of the conditions and attitudes of young people between the ages of sixteen and twenty-four in the state of Maryland. The survey began in 1935 and continued over a period of many months. Thirteen thousand, five hundred and twenty-eight young people were interviewed. Fifty-two percent were interviewed in their homes, thirty-three percent in their neighborhood, clubs, community centers, at the corner drug stores, etc.,

First of all, the results show that young people accept the faith of their parents, for,

Over four-fifths (81.1%) of the youth with some church affiliation had adopted the faith of their parents. <sup>1</sup>

The extent of church membership among the young people is shown as follows:

Seventy-one percent regarded themselves as members of some church. The degree of membership was found to be highest among the youth of the Catholic homes. 92% of the youth who had Catholic parents were members of some church; 69% of those who had Protestant parents were members of some church; while 22% of those whose parents had no religious affiliations were members of some church. <sup>2</sup>

Likewise, the results show that young people equal and occasionally surpass adults in the matter of church attendance.

Forty-five percent of all the young people who were interviewed indicated that they attended church once a week; 75% of the Catholic youth attended church once a week; 10% of the Jewish youth; and 40% of the Protestant. <sup>3</sup>

This survey shows that young people have a high regard for the church, that they participate in its activities, and that the religion of the home is a dominant factor in determining the later religious affections of youth. Howard M. Bell, the editor of this investigation, summarizes the attitudes of youth

<sup>1</sup> Howard M. Bell, Youth Tell Their Story, (American Council On Education, Washington D. C., 1938), p. 196. (A survey conducted for the American Youth Commission.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 196.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 197, 198.



toward religion and the church in these significant statements:

The data indicates, that, for all its alleged decadence as a vital social force, the church still retains a substantial measure of its original appeal. <sup>1</sup>

The majority of young people want to be identified as church members and like to have it known that they participate in its devotional services. <sup>1</sup>

In the minds of a great majority of youth, the church is neither a public forum nor a recreational center. It still retains its original character as a place of worship. <sup>1</sup>

The fact that a large majority of young people accept the faith of their parents indicates the important place of the home in determining religious loyalties and sentiments. Are parents taking advantage of this opportunity to teach children and young people the cardinal doctrines of their faith? Or do young people inherit their religious faith in much the same manner as they adopt the political beliefs of their parents? How much intelligent conviction is evident in the church affiliations of both adults and young people? Perhaps there is no definite way to determine the answer to these questions. But, because of natural family loyalties and the admiration of youth for their parents, fathers and mothers have a remarkable opportunity to instill intelligent Christian convictions in the lives of their children.

Another phase of the teaching function of the home is suggested by the problem of sex education. In recent years the church has taken a new interest in this important subject. The Maryland

---

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 205.



survey shows that the home ranks fairly high in this respect.

It says:

The Protestant home ranks highest with 32% of its youth receiving most of their sex knowledge from parents or relatives. Other percentages are: Catholic youth 29%; Jewish, 17%. The chief source of sex "education" for the youth of all ages and all religious groups was found to be the youth's contemporaries. One percent specified the church as their chief source of sex information.<sup>1</sup>

Much more progress can be made in this important field, but, in comparison with the homes of twenty years ago, great strides have been taken.

Another interesting insight into the attitudes of modern youth is found in the fact that the great majority want homes of their own. "Only eight percent said that they had no desire eventually to have children."<sup>2</sup> If this percentage expresses the typical attitude of all American youth, the continued existence of the family as the fundamental social unit seems reasonably well assured.

From this examination of religion in the lives of young people, we may conclude that in the modern home the religious problems of young people are very similar to those of adults. Both are distracted by a multiplicity of interests in an overcrowded social program. Their religious faith and loyalties seem to rise and decline together. Seldom do young people have

---

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

more religion than their parents, and parents who wish their youth to have the spiritual resources and moral safeguards of Christian faith must take a genuine interest in Christianity themselves. Otherwise the religion of youth will be only a matter of unintelligent assent to meaningless forms and ideas. Such a religion is neither self-satisfying nor socially constructive.

#### The Economic Status of the Home

The Christian home shares with all other religious and non-religious homes of America the advantages and problems which arise out of economic conditions. The mechanical progress of the past fifty years has produced a new type of economy in the United States. Industrial development and the growth of cities has ushered the home into a complicated economic situation. The modern home has received the benefits of this mechanical advancement in terms of new comforts and conveniences. A greater amount of leisure time for social and recreational pursuits has resulted. Likewise, new problems have arisen, and the sense of independence which characterized the families of a generation ago has given place to a new feeling of economic interdependence. The home is related to and vitally affected by all the changing currents of an industrial economy.

The economic status of the home is shown in a study of the incomes and cost of living in American families. A comprehensive picture of family incomes is reported as follows:

Incomes under	Per cent of families having
\$ 500	14
1,000	42
2,000	79
3,000	92
5,000	97
10,000	99

The fact that 42% of American families have an income of less than one thousand dollars suggests that the economic foundations of the home are inadequate.

When we examine the average per capita income of families of various sizes the problems of economic inequality and insecurity loom even larger. The report of 1938 shows.<sup>2</sup>

Number of persons per family	Average per capita income 1935-1936
2	\$ 744
3-4	542
3-6	355
7 or more	221
All	463

---

<sup>1</sup> National resources Committee, Consumer Incomes in the United States., (Washington, D. C., 1938), p. 18.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 21.



Thus the larger families are found to be living on the lower economic levels. According to these figures they would not be able to provide their homes with the actual necessities of life. Undoubtedly the economic fact is predominantly accountable for the gradual decrease in the size of the average American family.

In recent years prominent leaders in American politics have referred repeatedly to the fact that one-third of the nation is ill-housed, ill-clothed, and ill-nourished. This generalization is supported by the Social Work Year Book which says:

One-half to two-thirds of the children in American cities live in homes where the family income is less than the equivalent of \$1,260 for a family of four.<sup>1</sup>

The problem of economic insecurity also occupies a prominent place in the thinking of young people. The Maryland survey states that "A very large percentage of youth assert that economic security is their most urgent need."<sup>2</sup> The economic depression in America after 1929 has had a profound effect upon the attitudes and lives of young people. Referring to the economic status of the family in 1934, Hornell Hart and Ella B. Hart have said:

---

<sup>1</sup> Social Work Year Book, op. cit., p. 200.

<sup>2</sup> Howard M. Bell, op. cit., (Foreward)

President Green of the American Federation of Labor estimated in 1934 that over a million young people had been forced out of their homes because of economic stress and had become hoboes. Among these social drifters sexual promiscuity, thievery, paperization, disease, and mental disintegration flourished in spite of the gallant struggle carried on by many of them to maintain ideals. Over two million young people had postponed their marriages indefinitely on account of adverse economic conditions.<sup>1</sup>

Adverse economic conditions affect the family in many ways. In addition to the results which have been listed above, the problems of divorce and juvenile delinquency are accented by economic insecurity. Economic tensions are among the chief causes of family disorganization and divorce. Juvenile delinquency is found to be much higher among families of the lower income groups. The Department of Sociology of the Illinois Institute for Juvenile Delinquency reports as follows:

Six delinquent children come from homes which have an average monthly rental of \$22.00 or less, in comparison with one delinquent child which comes from homes where the average monthly rental is \$43.00 or more.<sup>2</sup>

Economic conditions in the American family have improved considerably in the past four years. A program of economic recovery and social service has been launched by the government. Business conditions have improved, incomes have increased, relief work has been sponsored to decrease unemployment, and great-

---

<sup>1</sup> Hornell Hart, Ella B. Hart, op. cit., p. 157.

<sup>2</sup> Local Community Fact Book for 1938, (Department of Sociology of the Illinois Institute for Juvenile Delinquency and the Chicago Recreation Commission.



ter help has been provided for the aged and dependent members of society. Better lodging for the poor, slum clearance projects, and a rapidly increasing tendency to suburban life point to a renewal of domestic stability. These are a few of the hopeful signs which must be considered in any prophecy of the future of the home. However, the above statistics show the magnitude of the economic problem. The problem has not yet been solved, but great progress has been made and economic conditions have vastly improved. Perhaps another economic lag is inevitable in the near future. The Christian home and all American homes face the ever recurring necessity of adjustment to changing economic standards. But the Christian home also has the opportunity of producing the ideals and the character which shall ultimately determine the conditions of economic life.

The problem of financial management is especially important to a study of the economic status of the home. The economic conditions of family life depend to a large extent upon how the income is used. Although many families in congested cities depend upon an industrial economy which is insufficient to provide proper food, housing, clothing and medical care, a greater majority of American families are subject to financial worries and tensions because they unwisely manage their incomes. Some families are able to live happily upon an annual income of \$1,000, care for medical needs and put aside a certain amount for savings; while other families with the same income will run a deficit and



live in constant fear of their creditors. The difference is not in income but in management.

In an investigation of Chicago families in 1935-36, results showed that 52% of the families with an income of approximately \$1,000 were able to save a surplus of \$60 per year. On the other hand, 43% of the families in this income group ran up an annual deficit of \$216 per family.<sup>1</sup> Evidently, the difference between these two groups of families consisted in the way they managed their incomes.

The system of installment buying has worked to the disadvantage of many families in the low income group. They have been encouraged to live beyond their means, and, in some cases, exhorbant rates of interest have mortgaged the futures of families who were not careful in budgeting their expenses. The installment plan, designed to benefit the lower income group, is often their most serious handicap. Economic fears and worries which disrupt family life may often be traced to installment buying.

The use of the budget system has proved valuable to many families in their financial planning. Through the budget system they have been able to clearly understand the limits of their expenditures and to plan accordingly. Young married couples have found the budget system especially helpful in the estab-

---

<sup>1</sup> Moses Jung, Editor, Modern Marriage, (New York; F.S. Crofts & CO., 1940), p. 131.

lishment of their new homes. At no time is budgeting more important. When the income and expenses are objectively studied in a weekly or monthly budget, harmony is more likely to prevail and the home is less likely to be disrupted by changing financial conditions. Budget planning will help to reduce impulsive spending and stimulate various members of the family to confine their expenses to their particular standard of living.

Economic mismanagement is a major source of discord in the homes. Many divorces, separations and broken homes can be traced to economic tensions which arise out of insufficient income and unwise management. Much of the unhappiness of modern marriages is rooted in unfair adjustments of family incomes. Husbands and wives should work together in the family financial planning. Justice and fair play should govern their personal allowances and expenditures.

The Christian family should be better able to solve the economic problems of the home because of the scriptural principles upon which it is founded. The church has taught the virtues of honesty, thrift, and justice. It has also encouraged the practice of systematic giving, tithing, and Christian stewardship for the support of its program. Such practices evidently have a carry-over value for they necessitate a certain amount of financial planning. Many Christians who practice tithing testify that thus they are introduced to a system of planning which enables them to make



the remaining nine-tenths of their income go further. No one can tithe without planning, and financial planning is essential to financial stability.

Dr. Leland Foster Wood points out the need for wise economic management in the home. He writes the following words as one of the "beatitudes" for the successful family: <sup>1</sup>

Happy is the family  
That spendeth not beyond its income,  
And is not afraid of the sudden terror  
That descendeth on the first of the month.

They shall enjoy what they have the more,  
And what they lack will do them less harm,  
Than if they had it with uneasiness of mind,  
And fear of the frown of the creditor.

They shall be counted wise in the evil day,  
For more joy can be gained from a little,  
Than from much unnecessary stuff,  
With unpaid bills behind it.

His words are similiar to the wisdom of Proverbs which says:  
"Better is little with the fear of the Lord, than great treasure  
and trouble therewith." <sup>2</sup>

### The Results of Christian Influence

A complete picture of the Christian home in America can be visualized only as we think of the effect that Christianity has had upon the various phases of family life. The Christian religion has put a definite religious content into family life by emphasizing the need for family devotions. It has supplied the major resource for these devotions by furnish-

---

<sup>1</sup> Leland Foster Wood, Six Tests of Marriage, (New York: The Federal Council of Churches, 1933), p.17.

<sup>2</sup> Proverbs 15:16.



ing the home its Bible. It has encouraged the teaching of the cardinal doctrines of faith, love, purity, service and good will. It has helped the home to become conscious of its responsibility in shaping the character and destiny of children and young people. It has emphasized the duties of both parents and children. It has elevated the status of women and children by its emphasis upon the fundamental Christian philosophy of the supreme value of human personality. It has aided the home in its adjustment to changing economic conditions.

The Christian home in America is not a perfect institution. It shares with all homes the problems and difficulties of modern life. Its chief distinction lies in the fact that it has a definite goal and purpose which other homes do not have. Its purpose is to glorify God, and to extend the influence of Christ and His church until all persons in every condition of life shall be permeated by His spirit. The glory of the Christian home is in what it is, and in what it may become.

Dr. Leland Foster Wood completes the picture by saying:

The influence of Christianity has given great strength to the ideal of loyalty, has glorified the parent-child relationship, and has gradually created an atmosphere of reverence for personality, and a measure of equality in the family. The Christian spirit of thinking first of others and of love as the dominant motive in all home relationships still has great unexhausted possibilities for beautifying family life.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Leland Foster Wood, Growing Together in the Family, (New York: Abingdon Press), p. 101.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE PROBLEM OF DIVORCE

One of the most important subjects to be considered in any study of the American home is the problem of divorce. This problem is not peculiar to the homes of America. It is a universal problem which affects every nation of the world. It has been the object of legislation and a concern of both the church and the state. A true conception of the status of the American home is impossible without an analysis of this important problem. The increasing prevalence of divorce is an indication of the break-down of family stability. It is a symptom of family disorganization. It may point out the lack of proper legislation on the part of the government or it may indicate the decline of the moral and spiritual idealism upon which the home is founded.

The problem of divorce is especially related to a study of the Christian home in America, not because divorces are more prevalent among Christian families, but because of the interest of the church in the general welfare of society. The Christian ideal of marriage and the integrity of the Christian family are endangered by the moral and social conditions which cause divorce. The churches of America have always upheld the ideal of marriage

as a permanent, monogamous union. Many Christian groups have passed specific legislation to apply to their adherents in order to safeguard and perpetuate this ideal. Increasing divorce rates indicate the decline of this ideal of marriage and tend to show the ineffectiveness of the home-centered program of the church.

This investigation shows that the problem of divorce is divided into four main considerations, namely: the extent of the divorce problem in America, the causes of divorce, Christian teachings regarding divorce, and some methods of solving the problem and of safeguarding marriage.

#### The Divorce Problem in America

The divorce rate has been steadily increasing in the United States during the past two generations. According to the most recent statistics from the Bureau of Census, Washington, D.C., the divorce rate in 1937 was five times what it was in 1880. In fact, it has more than doubled since 1900. The following table shows the divorce rate per one hundred marriages since 1880: <sup>1</sup>

Year	Divorce rate per 100 marriages
1880	3 1/2
1887	5 1/2
1900	8
1910	9
1920	13
1930	17

---

<sup>1</sup> Department of Commerce, Bureau of Census, Washington, D.C., 1940.



Year	Divorce rate per 100 marriages
1931	17 1/2
1932	16 1/4
1933	15 1/6
1934 - 35	16 2/3
1936	17 1/5
1937	17 1/2

The divorce rate per one thousand population is shown by the following table: <sup>1</sup>

Year	Number of Divorces	Rate per 1000 Population
1887	27,919	0.5
1900	55,751	0.7
1910	83,045	0.9
1920	170,505	1.6
1930	191,591	1.6
1937	250,000	1.9

These tables show that the divorce rate per one thousand population is nearly four times what it was in 1887. In 1887 there was one divorce for every nineteen marriages. In 1937 there was one divorce for every six marriages. If this rate of increase should continue for the next fifty years, nearly one half of all marriages would end in divorce. However, it will be noticed in the above table that the divorce rate in the United States has remained constant since 1930. In fact, it declined during the years 1932 to 1936 inclusive. This may be due to the adverse economic conditions which prevailed during those years. Many students of the subject agree with Dr. Hornell Hart and Ella B. Hart, who say:

Prosperity is another condition favorable to divorce,

---

<sup>1</sup> Ibid, Vol 9, No.60, p. 829.

while depressions are characterized by declines in the rate. The expense of divorce may deter people in hard times, even when they have already separated. Unemployment, however, is recognized by social workers as an important cause of family desertion. It may be that homes break up more in hard times, but that divorces do not catch up until prosperity returns.<sup>1</sup>

Another interesting view of the relation of economic condition to the problem of divorce, is quoted by the same authors:

The divorce rate per 100 marriages in 1932, instead of continuing the spectacular rise of previous years, dropped more sharply than in any preceding year on record in the United States. Dr. John Levy, on the basis of child guidance clinical experience in New York City, stated that the boom period before 1929 did more to break up family life than the depression up to 1934 had done. He found that many families were much better off both emotionally and spiritually as a result of hard times.<sup>2</sup>

Whatever the causes of divorce may be, the divorce rate in the United States is too high to allow an attitude of unconcern upon the part of those who are interested in the future welfare of the American home. All the causes of this high percentages of American divorces must be examined before a workable solution can be found.

It is interesting also to compare the divorce rate of the various states of the union. The state of Nevada has exceeded all others in its divorce rate over a long period of time, having a rate of 102.3 divorces per 1000 population, while the largest state, New York, has a rate of 0.9 per 1000 population.<sup>3</sup> The difference is largely accounted for by the lack of

---

<sup>1</sup> Hornell Hart, Ella B. Hart, Personality and the Family, (Boston: D.C. Heath & Co., 1935), p. 188.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 157-158

<sup>3</sup> Bureau of Census, op.cit., p. 833.



uniformity in the divorce laws which prevail in the different states. Perhaps Nevada was heir to hundreds of divorces which might have been obtained in New York were it not for the more stringent regulations which prevail in that state. In this respect, transportation facilities undoubtedly play a major role.

According to reliable authorities the divorce rate in the United States is higher than in European nations. Edward Westermarck says:

In Europe it is highest in Switzerland, but in the United States it is higher than in any European country, and the number of divorces probably exceeds that in all European countries put together.<sup>1</sup>

However, the divorce rate in the United States compares favorably with that of many leading nations. Revolutionary economic and social changes in such nations as Russia, Japan, Germany, and Italy make it difficult to obtain accurate information about the conditions of family life. Students of these countries radically differ as to the conditions which actually prevail. It is safe to say that the American home has as much stability as the homes of these countries where radical political changes have disrupted the family and other basic social institutions.

The conditions in America are serious enough to justify an attitude of alarm, especially if the rate should continue to

---

<sup>1</sup>Edward Westermarck, *A Short History of Marriage*, (New York: Macmillan Co., 1926), p. 297.



increase. The fact that it has remained constant for the past eight years, however, may be a hopeful sign that the rate of increase will be much slower in the future. At least, this is the fervant hope of all who are interested in the welfare of the home. At present the rate is too high, and steps should be taken to remedy the causes of divorce, in order that more stability and higher moral standards may return to American home life.

The problem of divorce cannot be measured adequately by charts, rates and tables. The tragedy and unhappiness which results from broken homes must be considered. The progress of the family, the church and the state is handicapped by the evils which attend careless marriage and easy divorce. Daily newspapers constantly remind us of the personal tragedy and sorrow which is caused by divorce. Juvenile delinquency often finds its source in discordant and broken homes. The state pays a penalty in increased costs for crime and court procedures. If the husband and wife were only persons affected the problem might not be so alarming. A serious handicap is placed upon the lives of children who must face life without the resources of devoted parental love and guidance.

Divorce, in every case, is an unfortunate catastrophe. It means that parties who had been joined together for a lifetime adventure, with high hopes of happiness, have failed to carry through the greatest of all human undertakings. The wreck-

age is not easily rebuilt. A sense of personal failure and frustration cannot be avoided. For these reasons, neither marriage or divorce should be considered lightly. High moral standards of fidelity, chastity and personal integrity furnish the only permanent basis for the future of the home.

### The Causes of Divorce

Any satisfactory solution to the problem of divorce must deal, necessarily with its causes. When the divorce rate of any nation rises high enough to cause serious alarm and to indicate a decadent condition of the family life, then the problem should be brought forcibly to the attention of the citizens concerned through a program of popular education. The church and state should cooperate in this endeavor and both should present some remedies for the situation. People who are educated as to the causes of family disorganization are better prepared to face and intelligently solve the difficulties of home life.

The causes of divorce are not easy to determine, for they do not appear in any surface observations of home life. They are often rooted in the temperament, habits and personal attitudes of the persons involved. Sometimes economic and social changes will bring the frictions of family life to the surface, and the family relation will be dissolved. Some students of family life place a great deal of emphasis upon



the economic causes of divorce and family disorganization. For example, in a discussion of this subject one author lists three causes of family disorganization as follows:<sup>1</sup> first, economic tension; second, the sex or response tension, a field in which the psychiatrist is pre-eminent; third, cultural tensions, caused by the differences of educational backgrounds or by mixed marriages of race or religion. All of these factors are important, but it is doubtful as to which is foremost in the causes of divorce.

Dr. Francis Peabody makes an interesting comment on the relation of economic conditions and divorce. He says:

The main sources of domestic instability are not economic, but moral. The problem of the family is not chiefly a result of defective social arrangements, but chiefly a result of a defective social creed. The truth of this statement is at once verified when one recalls the fact that divorce, like nervous prostration, is a disease which afflicts the prosperous more than it does the poor. ...Domestic instability is not chiefly the result of unpropitious circumstances, but of unspiritual and undomestic views of happiness and success. It is the consequence, not of a hard life, but of a soft creed; its chief provocations are not external, but internal; and its cure must begin with a finer social morality and a more worthy conception of the ends of human life.<sup>2</sup>

We have already noticed the effect of severe economic changes upon the divorce rate in America. During times of prosperity the rate increased; in years of depression it sharply declined. Perhaps it is safe to say that both extreme

---

<sup>1</sup> Moses Jung, op. cit., p. 26 - 31.

<sup>2</sup> Peabody, op. cit., p. 171, 172.



poverty and prosperity are as disruptive in family life, as they are harmful to the progress of religion. The admonition of the ancient writer of Proverbs is appropriate in this respect:

Give me neither poverty nor riches;  
Feed me with the food that is needful for me:  
Lest I be full and deny thee,  
And say, Who is Jehovah?  
Or lest I be poor and steal  
And use profanely the name of my God.<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Ernest R. Maurer furnishes some interesting statistics on the causes of divorce in a study of 295 cases. His findings have been charted as follows:<sup>2</sup>

<u>Natural Causes</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Financial tension	119	40.2
Desertion for another	39	13.2
Dissatisfaction with home life	32	10.9
Infidelity	31	10.5
Drunkenness and cruelty	29	9.9
Refusal to leave old home	23	7.8
Irregular habits	13	4.4
Irregular work and drunkenness	7	2.4
Forced marriage	2	0.7

Again it is interesting to notice that financial tensions are listed as the chief cause of divorce. But financial tensions are not always an indication of economic adversity. They may arise with greater frequency among the rich than among the poor. They probably plague the prosper-

---

<sup>1</sup> Proverbs 30:8,9.

<sup>2</sup> Roy A. Burkhardt, From Friendship To Marriage, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1937), p. 134.

ous more often, for the poor family has fewer financial problems about which they may disagree.

One of the most comprehensive pictures of the causes and conditions governing divorce is found in the following statement.

In general divorce is correlated with urbanized living, short duration of marriage, the absence of children, nonownership of property and the lack of religious controls. Divorce is not a characteristic of the highest educational and social stratum. It is not prominent among the class that initiates social change in general. It does not start at the top and gradually filter down through the social scale. Neither is it characteristic of the farming class, nor the immigrant, largely Catholic, laboring classes. It seems to characterize that vague area which we call the "middle classes". It is associated with the occupational classes that are mobile, in intimate contact with members of the opposite sex, and without high professional standards of behavior.<sup>1</sup>

Any destructive influence which flouts and degrades the Christian ideal of marriage may be listed as a cause of divorce. The ideals of family life which are portrayed in motion pictures often produce a harmful effect in the lives of children and young people. But far more harmful than the screen productions is the example which is set by the movie stars themselves. Many of the actors and actresses, who are idealized in the hero-worshiping mind of youth, seem to have little concern for the sanctity and permanency of marriage. Some Hollywood stars have been divorced as many as four and five times. This is nothing more than "consecutive" polygamy. What is the effect of this practice on the minds of American

---

<sup>1</sup> Modern Marriage, edited by Moses Jung, (New York: F.S. Crofts & Co., 1940), p. 15, 16.



youth? By no stretch of the imagination could it be called constructive. Motion pictures are now an established institution in practically every American community. They are recognized as one of the greatest means of public education. Since children and young people spend about twice as much time in the movies as they spend in the church and Sunday school, motion pictures have a greater opportunity to influence youth than the church. The church should oppose indecent motion pictures, and children and young people taught by Christian parents to discriminate between the false ideals of life and those which are high and worthy.

The factors which contribute to the problem of divorce are highly involved. An adequate solution must go to the root of the problem and deal with fundamental human philosophies and relationships, as well as external frictions. The Christian family should be willing to face frankly the possible causes of divorce. Prospective husbands and wives should enter into Christian marriage fully aware of the disruptive influences against which they must guard. Likewise, they must be seriously determined to make their marriage a permanent union, with no thought of dissolving their union for remarriage with other persons.

#### Christian Teachings Concerning Divorce

The subjects of marriage and divorce are closely related in the teachings of the New Testament scriptures.

An understanding of the principles of Christian marriage is necessary to a consideration of the Christian attitude toward divorce. Divorce is the negative aspect of marriage. Since the Christian teachings regarding marriage have already been investigated, it is necessary only to apply these teachings to the various phases of the problem of divorce. It is interesting to notice that the New Testament scriptures present some constructive principles which should be helpful in the understanding and solution of this problem. Much of the confusion in the minds of Christian people lies in their failure to accept the New Testament teachings regarding divorce, without reading into them the various traditions, doctrines, and prejudices of the churches, which have no real basis in the original teachings of Jesus and the apostles.

In dealing with this subject, an effort should be made to consider the Christian teachings of the New Testament from an objective and scientific point of view. The decrees of church councils and the laws of various church groups are valuable only in so far as they illustrate and explain the original teachings, which, alone, are authoritative for the Christian.

In the first place, the Christian ideal of marriage makes no provision and recognizes no grounds for divorce. Jesus sets up an absolute ideal of fidelity in the monogamous marriage. According to the Gospel of Mark, Jesus is asked: "Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife?" In other words,



is divorce permissible? His answer is:

Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her: and if she herself shall put away her husband, and marry another, she committeth adultery.<sup>1</sup>

The Gospel of Luke sets forth the same principle.<sup>2</sup> In the Gospel according to Matthew, we may notice two important alterations. First, the question is changed to ask, "Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for any cause?" or, in other words, under what circumstances is divorce permissible? Second, in Matthew the answer also is altered to include the clause "except for the cause of fornication".<sup>3</sup> Throughout Christian history, the church has been sharply divided over this difference. Some churches have followed St. Matthew in allowing divorce on the ground of infidelity. Others have followed Mark and Luke. Many of the Western churches have never officially recognized the divorce and remarriage.

We have no reason for believing that these teachings of Jesus were meant to be reduced into terms of legislation which the church might impose upon its members. It is probable that Jesus was setting forth an attitude and principle which the church should preach and teach to all the people. Ideals cannot be codified and legislated into people. They can be taught and encouraged. On a basis of free choice they must be accepted and practiced. When a home is broken by

---

<sup>1</sup> Mark 10: 11, 12.

<sup>2</sup> Luke 16: 18.

<sup>3</sup> Matt. 19: 9.

divorce, then the church is not bound by its near-sighted rules from extending help and sympathy to those in need.

When the church codifies the marriage ideal and officially condemns divorce and remarriage, it automatically withdraws fellowship from the so-called "sinful" men and women who make a failure of marriage. Instead of getting help from the church, they get excommunication. This is the natural and logical outcome of such a position. The only alternative for the church which tries to legislate the marriage ideal is insincerity, evasion and compromise. The facility with which marriages can be annulled in certain religious groups illustrates this point. Edward Westermarck says:

In spite of the theory of the indissolubility of Christian marriage, the Roman Catholic doctrine gives ecclesiastics a large practical power of dissolving marriages which may have appeared perfectly valid.<sup>1</sup>

The legalistic interpretation of the teachings of Jesus has been widely accepted. Many Protestant ministers refuse to remarry anyone who is divorced. Nowhere does Jesus give the church or its ministers authority for such a practice. In speaking of divorce Jesus was not legislating for the church or the state. He was asked a practical question. He gave a practical answer. It is as impossible to legislate His teachings about divorce as it is to legislate the Sermon on the Mount. It is absurd to think that laws can be passed to force

---

<sup>1</sup> Edward Westermarck, A Short History of Marriage, (New York: Macmillan Co., 1926), p. 290



people to "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness." Yet this principle is just as essential to moral and spiritual progress as is monogamous marriage. Lichtenberger defends the non-legalistic viewpoint when he says:

Jesus, in expressing his views on divorce, did not intend to legislate either for the church or for the state, but he enunciated great ethical principles as standards of both individual and social behavior. From this it follows that, while the duty of religious leaders is clear in the matter of upholding high ideals in regard to marriage and the family as among the most important concerns of life, the church may not legitimately insist in his name upon the incorporation of any interpretation of his views into State or ecclesiastical codes except as it applies them to other moral questions, such as temperance, truthfulness, chastity, and the like.<sup>1</sup>

Again, we notice that the teachings of Jesus place an equal responsibility upon the man and woman to preserve the permanency of their marriage. Neither should put away the other. Neither should be guilty of dissolving the marriage relation. In the case of fornication or infidelity, no penalty is placed upon the innocent party, except in the clause in Matthew which says: "he that marrieth her when she is put away committeth adultery." This clause is not included in Mark and Luke, and it is omitted from many ancient manuscripts. Otherwise, there is no justification in Jesus' teachings for the dogma that an innocent husband or wife is prohibited to remarry. The popular idea that an innocent husband or wife, who remarries, is living in sin and adultery has no strong foun-

---

2 J.P. Lichtenberger, Divorce: A Social Interpretation, (New York: Whittlesey House, McGraw Hill Book Co., 1931), p. 54.

dation in scripture. Concerning the dogma that a valid marriage can never be dissolved, Westermarck says:

This draconic legislation is undoubtedly due to the ascetic tendencies of the church which made her insensible to the misery caused by unhappy marriages. <sup>1</sup>

Furthermore, Jesus places no extreme emphasis upon adultery as one of the so-called cardinal sins. He seems to have no sliding scale by which he judges some sins to be more damning than others. He lists only one unpardonable sin - "blasphemy against the Holy Spirit." <sup>2</sup> The only definition he gives of adultery is found in the Sermon on the Mount. It reads:

Ye have heard that it was said, Thou shalt not commit adultery: but I say unto you, that every one that looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart. <sup>3</sup>

This definition is quite inclusive. It involves purity in thought and motive. It should eliminate all attitudes of self-righteousness and superiority on the part of the church and its ministers. At least, by this definition ministers cannot refuse to marry those who have committed adultery. In cases of divorce ministers seldom have any way of knowing which party has been responsible for breaking the marriage, either because of adultery or for other reasons. Ministers have no right to judge the morality of others. Therefore, they have no right to refuse their ministry, except as a matter of personal choice, to those

---

<sup>1</sup> Westermarck, op. cit., p. 306.

<sup>2</sup> Mark 3:28,29  
<sup>3</sup> Matt. 5: 27,28.



who have made a failure of marriage. Ministers may teach the true meaning and purposes of marriage; they may point out the evils of divorce; they should preach the responsibilities of Christian husbands and wives. Likewise, they can counsel with those in marital strife for the adjustment of their difficulties. This is the scriptural prerogative of a minister and by this constructive work he can help remove the causes of divorce and insure the perpetuation of the Christian ideal of marriage.

Christian teachings concerning divorce may be summarized by saying that marriage is not a temporary agreement, but a permanent and sacred union; that neither husband nor wife should violate their union by infidelity; that sexual promiscuity is prohibited, and that faithfulness in marriage and purity in thought and motive are required. These are the principles which the church must teach and preach, which the Christian should understand, and by which he should live. The requirements of marriage should be considered reverently and discretely. The responsibilities of marriage should be accepted soberly. Divorce should be avoided with all the intelligence and strength of character which a person possesses. When marriages fail the church must be ready and able to give sympathetic help and guidance. Only upon this basis can the real purposes of Christian family life be achieved.

A comprehensive summary of the Christian attitude toward divorce is found in the statement of the Federal Council of

### Churches which says:

Any form of marriage which from the start contemplates divorce is incompatible with the Christian ideal and with the clearest lessons of human experience. The most beautiful and satisfying experiences are for those who, having chosen wisely their life partners, achieve a life-long marriage with ever deepening love and loyalty. That such a union, dissolved only by death, and unspoiled by the memory of premarital indulgences or by degrading episodes after marriage, is best for the children of the household, would be admitted even by severe critics of the institution of marriage as it exists. The Christian ideal holds it to be best also for the parents and for those who, although childless, regard their marriage as involving a spiritual as well as a physical relation.

Divorce or separation may be preferable to the enforced continuance of a relation which has no true basis in mutual respect and affection as far as the two individuals concerned are involved, but the effect upon the children, the family and society must never be ignored or minimized. Moreover it is evidence of failure, always to be deplored, and to be avoided if by any means success can be achieved even over what may appear insurmountable obstacles.<sup>1</sup>

### Safeguarding Marriage

What are the factors which contribute to happiness in the home? How can the permanency of marriage be insured? How can the problems of divorce be solved? These questions are closely related. A complete study of the problem of divorce must deal with them. This investigation suggests some of the possible answers to these important questions.

First, civil legislation is found to play an important role in lessening the evils of divorce. Because marriage is a civil contract as well as a Christian sacrament, every civilized nation has designed laws to safeguard marriage and to deal with

---

<sup>1</sup> Social Ideals of the Churches, published by the Federal Council of Churches, (New York: 294 Fourth Ave.), p. 14.



the problems of divorce. In some nations divorce laws are more liberal than in others, and it is interesting to compare the effects of the various types of legislation. Investigations show that liberal divorce laws do not always increase the rate of divorce. Edward Westermarck says:

In Europe, also, the rates of divorce are certainly not proportionate to the facility with which divorce may be obtained according to the law; Norway, for instance, has a more liberal divorce law, but at the same time fewer divorces, than several other European countries.<sup>1</sup>

Some authorities believe that strict divorce laws are necessary to safeguard marriage. They say that if divorce is made too easy the foundations of family life will be destroyed. In this regard, Westermarck again says:

It is a widespread idea that divorce is the enemy of marriage and, if made easy, might prove destructive to the very institution of the family. This view I cannot share. I look upon divorce as the necessary remedy for a misfortune and as the means of preserving the dignity of marriage by putting an end to unions that are a disgrace to its name. The existence of marriage does not depend upon laws. ...If marriage is an institution (not an artificial creation) based on deep rooted sentiments, conjugal and parental, it will last as long as these sentiments last. And should they ever cease to exist, no laws in the world could save marriage from destruction.<sup>2</sup>

The manner in which divorce laws are enforced is as important as the legislation itself. The attitude and purposes of the lawyers, who deal with divorce, determines the effectiveness of the legislation. On many occasions they can use their counsel and influence to restore harmony and bring about

---

<sup>1</sup> Westermarck, op. cit., p. 306.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 308.

a peaceful adjustment of marital difficulties. Some divorce cases never reach the courts because of the sympathetic and tactfull advice of competent lawyers. On the other hand, lawyers may take advantage of divorce cases for personal material gain. Dr. George Walter Fiske suggests:

It should never be necessary for any abused wife or husband to go to a lawyer for help in domestic troubles. The most effective work of family rehabilitation is done with no lawyer in the court room, but only the judge and the couple involved.<sup>1</sup>

Many divorces have been prevented in the domestic relation courts, which are found in many leading cities, where only the judge and the couple involved discuss the problems presented and work out a satisfactory adjustment.

Also, effective legislation must deal with the underlying causes of divorce. Many marriages are completely wrecked before they reach the courts. Then it is too late for harmony to be restored in the home. Laws must be passed which will help eliminate some of the basic causes. A good example of such legislation is the law which now has been adopted by twenty states of the United States, requiring both applecants for a marriage license to present medical certificates from a licensed physician. The medical examination insludes a blood test for syphilis and other communicable diseases.<sup>2</sup>

On One of the primary needs in the United States is a uniform divorce law which will apply to all states. This would

---

<sup>1</sup> Fiske, op. cit., p. 129.

<sup>2</sup> Social Work Year Book, op. cit. p. 202.



eliminate the marriage and divorce mills which now flourish in many states. Also, it would give the persons involved a clearer understanding of the processes and penalties of divorce legislation. Wise legislation is an important item in the solution of the problems of divorce.

Another important factor in safeguarding marriage is an adequate understanding of the foundations of happiness in family life. Many couples enter the marriage relation with a deplorable lack of knowledge of the complex relations and problems of married life. They embark upon the sea of matrimony with high hopes and little knowledge and they are ready to jump overboard at the first signs of storm. Husbands and wives should be aware of the various tensions which cause disharmony in the home. Likewise, they should be acquainted with the attitudes and techniques which bring satisfaction and accord. In a study of one thousand married couples, Dr. Roy Burkhart asked them to suggest the "one solution for happiness in marriage". From the answers received he lists the following factors which are essential to happiness. In the order of their importance, they are listed as follows:<sup>1</sup>

1. Married couples must enjoy each other.
2. They must have similar interests.
3. They must have enough money.
4. They must be happy sexually.
5. They need to have children.
6. They need to belong to the same church and to similar clubs.
7. They need economic security.
8. They must know how to handle differences.

---

<sup>1</sup> Burkhart, op. cit., p. 134, 135.

All of these items are essential. They suggest a good outline for study and discussion for young people who are contemplating marriage.

Dr. Kershner, Butler University, suggests five items which are essential to happiness in marriage. Upon these foundations a real home can be constructed. They are basic in safeguarding marriage. They deal with the fundamental attitudes which must prevail in a real home. They are listed as follows: first, absolute confidence; second, mutual sympathy; third, mutual forbearance; fourth, mutual respect; fifth, justice. A home founded upon these principles will not fail, but without them happiness in marriage is impossible.<sup>1</sup>

Again, it is evident that the presence of children in the home exerts a stabilizing influence upon family life. The activities which are necessary for the care and nurture of children help to bind the parents more closely together. The Social Work Year Book makes this significant statement:

Divorce occurs with greater frequency in childless marriages. ...In 1928 in 63% of the divorces granted there were no children in the family. ...The statistics, when carefully analyzed, show no revolutionary changes, no alarming disintegration in family life, particularly where children are involved.<sup>2</sup>

The seeds of discord and disunity may exist in a home where there are children, but the additional responsibilities of such a home help to keep the parents out of the divorce courts.

---

<sup>1</sup> Fredrick D. Kershner, Dean, College of Religion, Butler University, (Class Notes, Christian Ethics).

<sup>2</sup> Lichtenberger, op. cit., p. 314.



Finally, the influence of the church should not be overlooked in considering the problem of divorce. Many investigations have been made which show the importance of religion and the church in safeguarding marriage. The results show that divorce is not a major problem of the Christian family. The results of three investigations conclusively prove this fact.

First, in 1929 the Protestant Episcopal church appointed a joint commission to study the whole problem of divorce. In its report to the general convention of the church the commission presented the following facts:

Of the 2,606,520 parishoners in 3,745 parishes a total number of 1,018 divorces were reported, or a rate of .39 per thousand, as compared with the rate of 1.66 per thousand of the total population in the United States for the year 1929. <sup>1</sup>

In commenting upon this survey and others of a similiar nature which were conducted by various Protestant groups, Dr. Lichtenberger says:

The problem of divorce is not especially serious in those cases where both husband and wife are regular attendants of our churches. ...the restraining influence of the church would seem to be an important factor - much larger than is generally supposed. ...the divorce rate might have risen even more rapidly but for the conservative influences exerted by religion as organized in the churches. <sup>2</sup>

Second, Dr. Walter Maier reports the results of an investigation which was conducted among the Lutheran churches. He

---

<sup>1</sup> Lichtenberger, op. cit., p. 314

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 313 - 315.

says:

An investigation undertaken by "The Lutheran", national weekly organ of the United Lutheran Church, showed on the basis of 527 replies to a questionnaire that of 68,559 marriage ceremonies only 1,073 ended in divorce. This suggests a ratio of one divorce to more than sixty marriages and shows that the church weddings are broken with one-tenth the frequency indicated by our national divorce rate.<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Maier also sent a questionnaire to a representative group of pastors in the Lutheran churches. He reports:

Two hundred replies were received from various sections of the country. The answers revealed that eighty-seven per cent of the churches did not have a single case of divorce during the year 1933. ...Two hundred pastors married nineteen hundred couples during the year 1933.. They reported thirty-seven divorces, making the divorce ration in the two hundred typical congregations one to fifty-one, instead of the prevalent rate for the entire country of approximately one to six. But of these thirty-seven divorces only fourteen were granted in which both the husband and wife were members of the church; and some of these fourteen couples were indifferent church attendants.<sup>2</sup>

Third, one of the most interesting surveys was conducted by Dr. George Walter Fiske, professor of Religious Education at Oberlin College. Dr. Fiske says:

The writer has for twenty-one years had keen graduate students from Japan, both Christian and Buddhist, in the same classes with Americans. They are less impressed with the fact that one American home out of seven is now ultimately broken by divorce than they are by the fact that probably 98 per cent of our really Christian homes are never broken up at all, because their religion is the best possible insurance against it.

The writer makes the above statement confidently, after corresponding with ministers of several denominations in sixty-one parishes in fifteen states, representing all parts of the country. ...From these men data has been gathered relative to 22,001 church-going white families, including 16,940 communicant families, whose family history has been known by their pastors for many years, while they were their pastors and since. In this large number of family groups,

---

<sup>1</sup> Walter A. Mair, op.cit., p. 14.      <sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 14.



we have been able to discover only 196 divorces. This is somewhat less than 1 per cent. And of this number, only 117 divorces were among church members or two-thirds of 1 per cent. Even doubling the number, to allow for possible error, it is safe to say that, although divorces in America are now one-seventh as numerous as the marriages, nearly all of them are among non-religious people, for our data safely indicates that less than 2 per cent of church-attending white families and perhaps 1 per cent of communicant families have any experience with divorce.<sup>1</sup>

The results of these three surveys show that religion and the church play an important role in safeguarding marriage. There is no serious problem of divorce among church-attending families. The restraining influence of the social pressures which are prevalent in the fellowship of the church may partially account for the extraordinary low rate of divorce. Family strife and discord often cause Christian families to withdraw from active participation and fellowship in the church. The fear of social ostracism naturally tends to discourage troubled husbands and wives from attending church. However, with few exceptions, these surveys give an accurate picture of the actual results of religion in family life. These considerations should encourage Christian churches and ministers to give more concern to the vital relation of the church and the home. The above statistics refute the pessimism of those who speak of the waning influence of traditional religion. They demonstrate the value of Christian worship and fellowship. Any adequate solution to the problems of divorce must necessarily include a consideration of the resources of religion and the program

---

<sup>1</sup> George Walter Fiske, op. cit., p. 206, 207.

of the church.

### Summary

Thus our investigation of the problem of divorce in America shows that the divorce rate in America has risen to alarming proportions. After a sharp decline in 1932, the rate has steadily risen until now there is one divorce for every six marriages. The causes of divorce are highly complicated in the mesh of personal character, attitudes toward life, economic and sexual tensions, cultural standards and modern social change. The Christian teachings concerning divorce uphold the ideal of permanent monogamous marriage, and furnish the basic elements of character upon which family life depends for its stability. Finally, this investigation shows the constructive influences which are at work in society to safeguard marriage and develop progressive patterns of Christian family life, not the least of which is the influence of the church and the modes of living for which the church stands. When the problem of divorce is considered in its entirety, we see that the future of the institution of the family depends upon which set of forces shall prevail. Unless the church can equip itself to meet the changing needs of Christian family life, forces which are less Christian will triumph. Without constructive Christian influences in the ascendancy our hopes for the future of the family are not encouraging. But, if the church will accept its reasonable responsibility and continue to assist the family in its adjustment to changing social patterns, the progress of the Christian home is assured.



## CHAPTER IV

### THE CHURCH PROGRAM FOR THE HOME

Christian homes do not just happen. Every home can be a Christian home and every home can achieve a standard of action which will justify the name Christian and bring honor to Christ and his church. This is a worthy goal, but it can be reached only through work, planning and sometimes sacrifice on the part of those concerned.

The church and the home have always been closely related. Early in Christian history the home was the meeting place for the church. Through the centuries the church has looked to the home as the primary agency for the propagation of its doctrine and faith. Likewise the church has depended on the home and family for its institutional support. In turn, the home has depended upon the church as its champion and defender against the destructive forces in a changing social and economic scene. The church has not always befriended the home. In some instances, through selfishness and neglect it has hindered the progress of wholesome family life. The record of the church is not clean, but the remarkable fact is that it continues to hold fast its purpose to be a friend to the family. This close bond of fellowship should be maintained. Homes need the church; the church needs the home; and both should cooperate for mutual benefits.

which can be obtained in no other way.

No investigation of the status of the Christian home in America is complete without a study of the present program of the church in its relation to the home. Is the church really trying to make a contribution to progressive family life? What is the church doing and what can the church do for the home? These questions can be answered by a study of the various aspects of the home centered program of the church. The present program of the church can be observed from four points of view; first, program planning for the home and family; second, education for Christian family life; third, the preaching program; fourth, making marriage impressive; fifth, pastoral care.

#### Planning for the Home

Today a more definite emphasis is being placed on the church's ministry to the home. This emphasis has grown out of a realization of the important function of the home as a builder of character and as a teacher of religion. If the family is the first school of religion from which children and youth derive their religious ideals and loyalties, then the church, in turn, should be a school for the family.

The Federal Council of Churches and the International Council of Religious Education have recently organized committees on marriage and the home to give specific instruction in program planning. Likewise, many separate church groups are proceeding along similiar lines. Local churches



are being encouraged to give a larger place in their yearly programs for special services to the home and family.

One vital aspect of this emphasis is the purpose which motivates it. Churches must take stock of their resources to see if they have anything worthwhile to contribute to the progress of the home. Formerly the church has thought of the home largely in terms of what the family could do for the church. Now the process is reversed. What can the church do for the family? The church has approached the family, urging the family to be loyal to its program. The family has been considered as a means to the end of serving the church. ~~Now~~, the institution of the family is being given more consideration. Christian family life is an end in itself, not necessarily as a means of promoting the welfare and strength of the church. The church is finding that by giving unselfish service to the home, its own strength and stability is advanced. This point of view is well expressed in a Religious Education Bulletin as follows:

Rather than looking upon families as sources from which to recruit prospective members and from which to build itself up as an institution, the church may well regard the family as the object of its more effective service. Many present-day families are confused as they face their responsibilities. They need assistance in finding their primary share in the task of education.<sup>1</sup>

In emphasizing this point of view in the approach to

---

<sup>1</sup> International Council of Religious Education, Home and Church Sharing in Christian Education, (Service Bulletin No. 422, 1935.) p. 17.

the home, the church is more nearly following the motto of Jesus, who said:

The son of man came not to be ministered unto but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.<sup>1</sup>

Two considerations are essential to effective program planning for family welfare. First, the church must understand the social and economic changes which are increasing the difficulties of home life. Second, the church must know the particular conditions and problems of the homes in its local parish.

One local church, after two years of intensive study of its membership, found that only 27 per cent of the members lived in families having children under nineteen years of age, which were united in the church. The membership was found to be divided as follows: <sup>2</sup>

1. 14 per cent live outside of homes.
2. 22 per cent live in homes with no children under nineteen years of age.
3. 37 per cent live in families which are divided between two or more local churches.
4. 27 per cent live in families united in the church and having children under nineteen years of age.

A knowledge of facts such as these is valuable as a guide to the church in planning its program. On the basis of the above study a plan was devised to unite the divided families in one church. Dr. Lentz says:

In divided families where 37 per cent of the church members live, often the church has created tension by

---

<sup>1</sup> Matt. 20: 28

<sup>2</sup> Richard E. Lentz, The Church Helps the Home, (Article: Bethany Church School Guide, February, 1941), p.135.



carrying denominational rivalry into the home. Conferences were held with these families, singly, by two leaders, one from each church. A non-partisan effort was made to consolidate the church's position in the home by uniting the family group in one or the other of the two churches, depending upon the preference and need of the family itself. Several transfers were effected but more important was the impression of church interest and unity made upon the family by this approach.<sup>1</sup>

This is only one example from a local field. It shows the necessity of a knowledge of local conditions as a base upon which to plan an effective program.

Again, in order to help the home, the church must know the basic needs of the families of its community. The needs may vary from year to year, depending upon external social conditions. However, a few definite essentials should always have a place in the home-centered program of the church.

First, there is a need for the religious education of children in the home. The church should have definite plans and resources to supply this need.

Second, there is the need for family religious observances. The church should be conscious of this opportunity to serve.

Third, there is a need for more family unity and fellowship. Especially is this true of the modern city home which is broken up by many distractions. The church should help to unify and strengthen the ties of family life. It should help to make the home a center of joyful recreation and fellowship.

---

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 135.

Fourth, many homes need help in making economic adjustments. In specific cases the church may be able to give definite help. At all times the church should be conscious of changing economic conditions and their effect upon the stability of the family.

Fifth, there is the basic need for the knowledge of Christian ideals of family life. Through preaching, church school classes, and work with various groups and individuals, these needs should be supplied.

Other specific needs in sex education, discipline, and personal adjustments will arise from time to time. To these the church must be ready to minister.

Each church should have a committee on Christian family life if it intends to carry out a definite and comprehensive yearly program. This committee may cooperate with the pastor in promoting the welfare of the home. Valuable suggestions and resource materials may be obtained from the Committee on Marriage and the Home, of the Federal Council of Churches and also from the International Council of Religious Education.

In planning its program the church may take advantage of such special days as Mother's Day, Father's Day, and Children's Day. It can use these occasions to emphasize the spiritual meaning of home relationships that the spirit of Christ may uplift and beautify family life and that God may be more clearly revealed in daily attitudes



and fellowship..

### Education for Christian Family Life

One important phase of the home-centered program of the church is the emphasis upon education. The renewed interest in this approach to the Christian home is evident from an examination of the programs which are being promoted by both Catholic and Protestant churches. The Catholic church has always placed great emphasis upon the teaching of children in the home. It is now promoting well organized plans for the premarital education of young people. Both the Protestant and Catholic groups are sponsoring parent education for new home-makers and premarital instruction for youth. An examination of these various fields of endeavor reveals what is being done.

First, parent education is being undertaken by many church groups, not only to help the parent achieve greater joy and satisfaction, but also to help them answer the questions of their children. This procedure is in harmony with the Biblical idea which maintains that the church is to teach the parents, and, in turn, the parents are to teach their children. Valuable study courses are available in the Christian Education of parents and some church schools are organizing special groups to study these courses. Other churches are uniting to carry on cooperative community projects in this field. A select list of texts for this program is pro-

vided by the International Council of Religious Education.

Some local churches are building a lending library of books and pamphlets which will give guidance to parents and aid them in understanding and teaching their children.. Others are putting select books on parent education in their reading rooms where they are available to all.<sup>1</sup>

Second, the church is giving more time to the training of young people for Christian family life. The Youth Conference Movement gave the church its first real opportunity in this field. Courses on the Christian home soon proved very popular. Since 1934 the United Christian Youth Movement has included the home as one of its major areas of action in the program of "Christian Youth Building A New World". The program includes a study of the Christian concept of marriage, the present conditions of family life, courtship, engagement and the home-making skills necessary to a successful marriage.

Out of this conference emphasis many youth groups have continued the program in their local churches. Through cooperation with the pastor, literature has been made available, lectures and discussions have been promoted and study classes have been organized.<sup>2</sup>

Third, churches and church schools are now giving special attention to the education of new home-makers.

---

<sup>1</sup> Appendix I

<sup>2</sup> Appendix II



Some churches have special classes for brides and grooms. Thousands of church schools have classes for young married people. Many valuable courses are now available. This is a wonderful opportunity for the church to render a needful service. Young married people readily appreciate and respond to any effort which the church puts forth to help them make the necessary adjustments in forming their new homes. A list of helpful courses of study which can be used in the regular sessions of the church school is given in the appendix of this thesis.<sup>1</sup>

Fourth, a more highly specialized form of education for family life is found in the premarital instruction which is now being encouraged by all church groups. This is an important phase of education which is especially appreciated by young people. Premarital instruction may be given either through individual conferences or through group study. Both methods are now being used.

The Catholic church uses the method of group instruction to good advantage. The local priest gathers the prospective married couples together at the parish house and shares with them a special course of lectures and discussions which deal with various phases of marriage and the home. This method is also recommended by the Church of England and the following abbreviated outline suggests some of the subjects

---

<sup>1</sup> Appendix III

which are presented:<sup>1</sup>

I. Introduction, the Marriage relation, unique-permanent.

II. The Physical Aspect of Marriage.

1. Physical side often imperfectly understood.
2. Sexual relationships.
3. The value of physical relationships.
4. Continence and self-control.
5. Transference of sex energy.
6. Advantage of premarital consultation.
7. Parenthood.

III. Mental and Spiritual Aspects of Marriage.

1. The right approach to marriage.
2. Marital harmony.
3. Marriage a creative union.

Perhaps such a plan may be too complicated for an ordinary minister to use. A simpler plan might bring more fruitful results. Dr. Lewis Joseph Sherrill suggest a valuable procedure which can be used in a young people's group.<sup>2</sup> In one case a six-weeks program was arranged, entitled "Looking Forward to Marriage." Lectures and discussions were held on Sunday evenings as follows:

1. Introductory period, led by chairman of committee.
2. The psychology of sex; discussion led by a psychiatrist.
3. The biological background of marriage; discussion led by a physician.
4. The cost of marriage; led by a banker.
5. Premarriage ideals; led by a woman.
6. Finding happiness in marriage; led by the pastor.

A program was published, announcing topics and questions for discussion under each; giving bibliography for each

<sup>1</sup> Nash, op. cit., p. 283 - 286.

<sup>2</sup> Sherrill, op. cit., p. 204, 205.



topic. Various methods may be used and adapted to special groups. The importance of this opportunity for the church to minister to those who are anticipating marriage cannot be overemphasized.

A large number of churches give premarital instruction through personal interviews. In this method the minister is generally the key person. He has an opportunity to counsel and advise the couples who meet with him to plan for their weddings. The couple usually has many general questions to ask regarding the time of the service, arrangements for the church or the home, and questions regarding the ceremony itself. In turn, the minister has an opportunity to question the young people in regard to their new home, their work, their future plans, their religious connections, and their preparation for the experiences of married life. In some cases the couple may wish to arrange later interviews to discuss these subjects more fully. In most cases these questions can be discussed frankly and without embarrassment for either the young people or the minister.

Some ministers arrange thorough and lengthy interviews, discussing in detail the various aspects of married life, such as economic planning, birth control, parenthood and the sex relations. Not all ministers are qualified for this detailed type of interview. The large majority should be content to give the general suggestions for which they are qualified. As a supplement to this method, they can

give or recommend to the couple suitable books which deal in detail with the more intimate adjustments. In this regard the advice of Rev. Burris A. Jenkins is very appropriate. He says:

The average bridegroom does not care for advice. He thinks he knows it all, because he has roistered around town a bit before marriage. I used to make it a practice to spend an hour almost forcing myself upon the intended bridegroom, and sometimes upon the bride herself, to try to impart to them the rudiments of the art of love. Now I save time by giving them a pamphlet written by a young minister in California.<sup>1</sup>

Most ministers will find this advice valuable.

But whatever method of premarital instruction is used, its effectiveness depends to a large extent upon the general attitude of the minister and the spirit in which the interview is carried out. Of course accurate information is important. The minister should not try to give information in areas of experience in which he is not qualified. But in all cases he should remember that he is a minister of religion. He is seeking to help in the consummation of a Christian marriage and in the building of a Christian home. He must be conscious of the spiritual ideals which are essential, and through his service to the couple involved, they should be led into a deeper appreciation of life's most important venture.

#### The Preaching Program

The pulpit is one of the primary agencies for Christian education. Christian people still depend upon the preach-

---

<sup>1</sup> G.B. Oxnam, Preaching and the Social Crisis, (New York: The Abingdon Press, 1933) p. 132.



ing of the gospel as a source of information and inspiration for the problems of daily life. Preaching exerts a powerful influence on the ideals and attitudes of men, women and youth. The church depends primarily upon preaching for the establishment of its doctrines and practices. Especially is this true of the Protestant churches. Since the home is a fundamental unit of social life, and since the church depends so much upon the wholesome family life for the effectiveness of its message, the problems of home and family life should occupy a fundamental place in the preaching program of the church.

In recent years more emphasis is being placed upon the home as a subject for pulpit messages. The Federal Council of Churches encourages the practice of preaching annual series of sermons on marriage and family life.<sup>1</sup> Many local pastors have made such preaching an important part of their program. Some have set aside a certain month in the year for a special emphasis upon the home. During this month they have emphasized other phases of the church program which minister to the home, such as conferences for young people on the home, the dedication of children and their parents, the enlistment of families in the church school, and special programs to recognize children in the worship services.

The month of May is especially appropriate for an emphasis upon the Christian home. The long established custom

---

<sup>1</sup> Building the Christian Family: A Program for the Churches, (Committee on Marriage and the Home, Federal Council of Churches, New York) p. 4.

of observing Mother's Day, and the sentiment which has developed about it, furnish an unparalleled opportunity for the wise pastor to supplement this sentiment with a valuable and comprehensive preaching program. By such a program the maudlin sentimentality generally connected with Mother's Day can be constructively channeled into productive education on the general theme of Christian family life.

The value of such a program of preaching is apparent. It helps to make Christian parents more conscious of their responsibilities. It inspires and informs young people concerning the Christian ideals of marriage. It should help husbands and wives in the solution of disruptive family problems. Above all, it should make the family aware of the earnest desire of the church to serve the needs of its community and constituency. The church which serves the home, promotes its own strength and usefulness.

Dr. Albert Beaven, during his pastorate at the Lake Avenue Baptist Church of Rochester, New York, gave special attention each year to a series of sermons on the home and family life. He preached his messages on Sunday nights, and his book, "The Fine Art of Living Together", is a collection of the sermons he used. As to the value of this preaching, Dr. Beaven says:<sup>1</sup>

1. It offers a pastor an opportunity to say many

---

<sup>1</sup> Albert W. Beaven, The Fine Art of Living Together, (New York; Harper Brothers, 1927), p. 18, 19.



things, from the pulpit, which both the young people and their parents hear which would be rather embarrassing to say to them if they were seated in his office.

2. It enables him to reach hundreds..of couples with a helpful message who never would come and sit down to discuss these problems with him.

3. It tends to draw the young people who are intending to make a home into a relationship to a church.

4. When difficulties arise, after the wedding day, it makes it easier for young people to come and consult with their minister without embarrassment because they have been conscious that he is interested in their possible difficulties, even before they arise.

What shall be the content of sermons on the Christian home? First, the minister may preach to the young people on the general theme of preparation for marriage. He may deal with the problems which young people face in choosing a life mate and the qualities and characteristics which are essential for the foundations of a happy marriage. Abundant resource material from the Bible, from contemporary literature, and from everyday life can beautifully color such a message.

Second, the preacher may deal with the Christian ideal of marriage, giving an exposition of the scriptural teachings upon the subject and their application to the problems of modern life. In this he may use such booklets as "Ideals of Love and Marriage" or "A Christian View of Marriage"<sup>1</sup> which give a valuable brief statement endorsed by the leading Protestant churches of America.

---

<sup>1</sup> Published by Federal Council of Churches, 297 Fourth Ave., New York.

Third, he may deal with such subjects as the essentials of a Christian home, the relation between the church and the home, the friends and foes of the modern home, the relation of parents and children in the home, the teaching of religion and religious observances in the home.

No apology should be needed for dealing with such subjects from the pulpit. Indeed, the apology should rather be for the fact that the church and its minister gives too little attention to a subject which is obviously of immense importance to the general well-being of the church and the community. By dealing with such vital problems the minister may escape the caustic condemnation of one parishoner who said concerning his pastor: "invisible six days of the week and incomprehensible on the seventh".

#### Making Marriage Impressive

The solemnization of marriage is one of the most important functions of a minister. It is a door of opportunity through which a minister may enter intimately into the thoughts and plans of young people and by which he may make a constructive contribution to the building of a Christian home. Of course, hasty and careless marriages limit the contribution that a minister can make in this regard. For this reason such marriages should be discouraged. When young people rush into marriage and give but slight consideration to the planning of the ceremony they lose some of the beauty and significance which otherwise they might enjoy. The minister



should cultivate in the public mind the idea that marriage is an occasion worthy of careful planning.

The importance of this function of a minister is emphasized when we realize how many young people of America still come to the church for their marriages. Dr. Floyd Faust of Columbus, Ohio, gives some interesting facts in this regard. He says:

A study of our county Probate Court records revealed recently that in 1900 56 marriages out of 1,581 were performed by civil authorities, or 4.3 per cent. By 1920 the percentage had fallen to 3.5 per cent, and in 1930 to 2.9 per cent. In 1940 it rose again to 4 per cent but is still less than in 1900. This figure suggests the conclusion that the commonly reported trend to secular marriages is unwarranted by the facts.<sup>1</sup>

This may be considered a typical example of the situation which prevails throughout the United States. It indicates the responsibility which falls upon the minister; it suggests the extent of his opportunity to help make marriage a rich and significant experience in the lives of the youth who come to him for their wedding rites.

The importance of making marriage impressive is further emphasized by Grace Sloan Overton, who says:

I recall seeing a wedding in Russia. The man and woman came together in an office very plainly, even crudely, furnished and without the slightest suggestion of wedding atmosphere. They made the few brief entries required for the record, paid the nominal fee, and then departed as man and wife. Perfectly legal; perfectly unimpressive!<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Floyd Faust, The Church and the New Homes, (Article: in the Christian Evangelist, February, 1941.)

<sup>2</sup> Grace Sloan Overton, The Home in a Changing Culture (New York: Revell, 1935) p.87.

The same author describes a wedding which she saw in America. It was held in a church where hundreds of friends and relatives were gathered. Here the ceremony was made socially and spiritually significant, not only to the couple being married, but also to the hundreds of friends, relatives and fellow townsmen. In conclusion the author says:

Sometimes in expressing our scorn for sham, we have violated good taste in our sophistication and in appearing too non-chalant about experiences which are really meaningful and important. Certainly marriage is sufficiently important to merit the dignity of ceremony, the beauty and sanctity of ritual, and the sacrament of vows.<sup>1</sup>

The preparations for a wedding need not be too extensive and expensive. The ceremony itself need not be elaborate and formal. The marriage may be solemnized at the home or parsonage in the presence of a few friends and relatives, or it may be performed at the church in the presence of many people. In either case it may be made highly significant and impressive.

What makes marriage meaningful? Much depends upon the attitude of the minister and the couple to be joined. Pre-marital conferences help to establish a valuable bond of understanding between young people and their minister. During these conferences the minister may well guard against carelessness on his part. Weddings may be a part of his professional routine, but to the young people who are being married it may be the event of a lifetime.

There is no universal practice in regard to the ac-

---

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 99.



ceptance of a wedding fee. While some ministers prefer not to accept fees for weddings, at the other extreme are some whose interest in the fee is too obvious. Although social custom sanctions the receiving of such a fee, an impression of commercialism on the part of the minister will doubtless detract from the real significance of the wedding and may be detrimental to the minister's future relationship with the new family. In all cases the minister should place the welfare of the couple ahead of his own interests. His attitude of genuine concern and his sympathetic counsel may be a major factor in the beginning of a new Christian home.

#### Pastoral Care

The work of the minister is highly significant in the establishment and growth of Christian homes. We have already noticed the many points of contact and opportunities for service which are open to him. He is partially responsible for the planning of the entire home-centered program of the church. Through premarital interviews, preaching, and through the marriage ceremony itself he comes into vital contact with the home. Pastoral calling is another place where the church and the home meet in intimate contact.

The pastor's calling can be a great help to homes in carrying out their Christian ideals and functions. In this important endeavor the minister may profitably re-examine his motives. Pastors generally call in the homes of their members to promote church attendance and to get new members.

While this motive is indeed worthy and proper, a higher motive may be for the pastor to call for the express purpose of serving the home. His mission may be as definite as that of a physician who calls to minister to the physical health of the family. The minister may be only interested in using the family to promote the church, or he may use the resources of the church to meet family needs and solve home problems. Parents and children will often be quick to ascertain the motives of the pastor and they may respond more readily to the pastor who calls to serve.

The contacts of the pastor in the home should help the family look to him as their spiritual counselor and guide. This will entail more than ordinary preparation on the part of the pastor. Through his study and knowledge of the methods of personal and family adjustment he should be equipped to render a high type of professional service in a non-professional manner. The study of psychology, mental hygiene, and social case work, will be a valuable part of every minister's equipment. By such a procedure the minister may lift his parish work to a scientific level, which should prove personally significant, interesting and enjoyable.

One unlimited area of service for the minister is in the program of pastoral care for young married couples. He should evolve a definite plan to keep in close contact with every couple which he unites in marriage. Many pastors have worked out such plans and have found them to be a most re-



warding phase of their ministry. Perhaps the most successful and suggestive plan is that used by Bernard C. Clausen. In detail it is given as follows:

Before the licenses were sent back to the Clerk's office, facts were carefully recorded in a card-index file for my office. Not a year went by without at least one letter to every couple I have ever married. Always that letter called for a reply from the young people themselves. Every baby born to them was greeted with a personal note from me. Every move they made, promotion they achieved, sorrow they suffered, became a part of my interest.

Every year in June, I have over one of my Sunday morning services to what we called our 'Wedding Bells Reunion'. To this, I invited all my brides and grooms...The sermon would always deal with some of the spiritual problems of married life, and those who could not come always received through the mail, subsequently, a copy of the sermon outline so that they could test out the truth in the application of their own lives.

How they came! Hundreds of them, from all parts of the country, at the expense of wearisome effort, bringing their children with them to play in our nursery or overflow into our Sunday school rooms, while the service was held. Each year they would say to me, 'It helped us to realize that you remembered! Sometimes we were tempted to give it all up-a fit of temper brought us into a quarrel, and then we recalled that you remembered us. It helped!'

Have there been any results except casual pleasant remarks? I have married in the course of the last fourteen years 722 couples. Half of these had only the most superficial contact with me before the wedding. The average divorce rate would have given my group a total of 123 broken homes. Up to date, less than a dozen of these homes have been shattered by dissension, and less than a half a dozen of them have been ruined by divorce. And the experience has been one of the most rewarding things in my life. <sup>1</sup>

Each minister must work out his own plans for this kind of pastoral service, but the field seems to possess unlimited

---

<sup>1</sup> Bernard C. Clausen, An Adventure in Defeating Divorce (Journal of Social Hygiene, March, 1934.)

possibilities.

Again, the pastor may lead his church in planning many special programs which will increase his service to the Christian home. Two special programs which are highly recommended to the local church are concerned with the dedication of homes and the dedication of parents and children.

Services for the formal dedication of children and parents have been used by some churches for many years. In recent years some churches which do not practice infant sprinkling or christening have begun to recognize the importance of some formal recognition of the responsibilities of parenthood. Dedication services have been introduced to stress the duties of parents and to encourage the Christian nurture of children. Some churches have an informal but impressive ceremony in which the parents bring their child to the the front of the sanctuary for a prayer of dedication when they bring the child to church for the first time. Other more formal ceremonies are carried out by some churches at various seasons of the year.

However, great care must be exercised in the use of these services. There is a danger that confusion may arise in the minds of many who are unacquainted with them. The dedication service is apt to be confused with christening or so-called infant baptism, both of which are foreign to the polity of New Testament churches.

In some dedication services an effort is made to avoid involvement in controversial theological issues. The difference



between Christian baptism and christening is fully explained. The parents are charged to nurture their children in the Christian way of life so that they may desire Christian baptism when they reach the age of accountability. One beautiful service which contain this explanation is called "The Blessing of Little Children." <sup>1</sup>

Second, many pastors are leading their churches in the use of home-dedication services. Concerning such services, Dr. Leland Foster Wood says:

...nothing is more appropriate, for if we dedicate churches, for worship at intervals, much more should we consecrate homes in which families have fellowship with God and taste the good gifts of life continuously. <sup>2</sup>

A beautiful service for the dedication of homes is furnished in the book entitled, "Harmony in Marriage". <sup>3</sup>

Thus it appears that the pastor has unlimited opportunities for binding the home and the church together. He may use the resources of Christian knowledge and experience to serve the needs of family life. An exhaustive study of this field would include the whole realm of a minister's pastoral work. These few suggestions indicate what the church is doing to minister to the modern home.

Every church should be conscious of the new areas of service which are open. The progress of science and the advancement of learning has increased the capacity of the alert and diligent church to serve the home. These two great American

---

<sup>1</sup> Peter Ainslie, H.C. Armstrong, Christian Worship (Baltimore: Seminary House Press, 1923) p. 96 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Leland Foster Wood, Growing Together in the Family (Abingdon Press, New York, 1935)

<sup>3</sup> Leland Foster Wood, Harmony in Marriage, (Round Table Press, 1939).

institutions may work more closely together for their mutual benefit, and for the advancement of a genuine Christian culture which will bring greater freedom and happiness to the nation and to the individual.



## CONCLUSION

This study of the Christian home in America helps us to understand some of the conditions and problems which are common to all American homes. The Christian home shares with other religious and non-religious homes the benefits and blessings which result from social, intellectual and scientific progress. Likewise, it is affected, for good or ill, by all the currents of political and economic change. Although this investigation does not attempt to analyze in detail the various conditions and problems of modern home life, it does endeavor to set forth a comprehensive picture of the character and content of the Christian home. Such a picture may serve as the basis for a forecast of the future of the home..

First, we may conclude from a study of the character of the Christian home that many such homes exist in America today. Thousands of parents are consciously endeavoring to order family life according to the principles of Christ. They are trying to follow Him in their daily lives; they carry His spirit into their homes; they try to make their home life a vital part of their Christian witness to the world. Moreover, children and youth are conscious of the demands of a Christian home and the ideals of such a home are an inspiration to them as they look toward their own futures. The Christian home

is thus a definite and distinctive institution of American society, and the widespread acceptance of Christianity has unconsciously and indirectly influenced other thousands of homes which live by the principles which they refuse to openly recognize or accept. The character of the Christian home as described and taught in the New Testament will probably continue to challenge and inspire the homes of the future. For the Christian home is not a static institution. It is based upon progressive principles which are capable of meeting the needs of changing social patterns.

Second, a study of the present status of the Christian home shows that many changes, economic, social, scientific and educational, are influencing the Christian home of today and necessitating a constant program of adjustment. New patterns and modes of family life are being developed and through these the Christian religion must express itself to conserve the better quality of old family life and help develop the best in the new.

Many conditions of modern home life are distressing and alarming. Especially is this true in regard to the problem of divorce, which threatens to destroy the stability and usefulness of the family. An intelligent and realistic approach to the disruptive influences which imperil the Christian ideal of the home is a primary need. No progress can result from ignoring these influences. The demands for looser family ties and



lower ideals of marriage must be faced frankly. They will be tested by the demands of the times, and the past experience of the human race in its developing pattern of family life proves the Christian ideal of the home to be supremely worthy.

Third, this investigation shows that the church is developing an extensive home-centered program to serve the needs of the homes of America. This is one of the definitely encouraging signs of the time. Local churches are including the home and family as a chief avenue for the ministration of the church and the Christian religion. A new point of view is arising which considers family life as an end in itself, not as a means to the end of promoting the church. Therefore, local churches are giving more attention to parent education, premarital instruction, the Christian education of children in the home, and a home-centered program for preaching and pastoral care. In future years this emphasis should bear fruit in thousands of new, significant, purposive and joyful Christian homes.

As long as the church continues to do its part in preaching and teaching of the Christian Gospel, we need have no fear for the future of the Christian home. Should the church deliver itself into the hands of the forces of reaction who, through fear or selfishness, refuse to face the demands of a changing social pattern, and substitute the dogmas of men for the Gospel of God, then the home must look elsewhere for its sanction and support. As long as suitable educational prep-

aration is given, society need not fear for the ultimate future of monogamic marriage. The Christian ideal of a loyal and permanent monogamic union has proved by experience to most adequately satisfy the basic social and sexual needs of man. Only as the members of society understand and work for the realization of Christian values can wholesome family life be attained. Christian homes cannot exist in a pagan society. The building of Christian homes necessitates the forward progress of the Christian religion in all other areas of individual and social living. The home is a proving ground. If Christianity can succeed here it can triumph elsewhere. If it fails in the home its failure is complete.



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Books

- Ainslie, Peter, and Armstrong, H. C. Christian Worship.  
Baltimore: Seminary House Press, 1923.
- Beaven, Albert W. The Fine Art of Living Together.  
New York: Harper & Brothers, 1927.
- Burkhart, Roy A. From Friendship to Marriage.  
New York: Harper & Brothers, 1937.
- Edersheim, Alfred. The Life and Time of Jesus the Messiah.  
New York: Longman, Green and Co., 1903.
- Fiske, George Walter, The Changing Family. New York:  
Harper and Brothers, 1928.
- Hart, Hornell, and Ella B. Personality and the Family.  
Boston: D. C. Heath and Co., 1935.
- Holt, Arthur E., The Fate of the Family in the Modern World.  
Chicago: Willett, Clark, & Co., 1936.
- Jung, Moses. Editor, Modern Marriage. New York: F. S. Crofts  
& Co., 1940.
- Kurtz, Russell H. Editor, Social Work Year Book  
New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1941.
- Lichtenberger, J. P. Divorce: A Social Interpretation.  
New York: The McGraw Hill Book Co., 1931.
- Maier, Walter A. For Better not for Worse. St. Louis:  
Concordia Publishing House, 1936.
- Nash, A. S. Editor, Education for Christian Marriage.  
New York: The Macmillan Co., 1940.
- Overton, Grace Sloan, The Home in a Changing Culture.  
New York: The Flemming H. Revell Co., 1935.

- Oxnam, G. B., Editor, Preaching and the Social Crisis. New York: Abingdon Press, 1933.
- Peabody, Francis, Jesus Christ and the Social Question. New York: The Macmillan Co., 1920.
- Sherrill, Lewis Joseph. Family and Church. New York: Abingdon Press, 1937.
- Westermarck, Edward. A Short History of Marriage. New York: The Macmillan Co., 1926.
- Widgery, Alban. Christian Ethics in History and Modern Life. New York: Round Table Press. 1940.
- Wood, Leland Foster. Growing Together in the Family. New York: Abingdon Press. 1935.
- Wood, Leland Foster. Harmony in Marriage. New York: Round Table Press. 1939.
- Wood, Leland Foster. Six Tests of Marriage. New York: The Federal Council of Churches. 1933.
- The Bible: American Revised Version.

#### Public Documents

- Census of Religious Bodies., U. S. Department of Commerce. Bureau of Census. Washington. 1938.
- Consumer Incomes in the United States. Washington: National Resources Committee. 1938.
- Marriage and Divorce Statistics. Washington: Department of Commerce. Bureau of Census. 1940.
- United States Statistical Abstract. Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office. 1939.

#### Reports

- Bell, Howard M. Editor, Youth Tell Their Story. Washington: American Council on Education. 1938.
- Home and Church Sharing in Christian Education. Service Bulletin No. 422. International Council of Religious Education. Chicago. 1935.
- Building the Christian Family: A Program for the Churches. New York: Federal Council of Churches.



Social Ideal of the Churches. New York: Federal Council of Churches.

A Christian View of Marriage. New York: Committee on Marriage and the Home. Federal Council of Churches.

Local Community Fact Book. Chicago: Department of Sociology, The Illinois Institute for Juvenile Delinquency and the Chicago Recreation Commission. 1938.

The World Almanac and Book of Facts. New York: Published by the New World Telegram. 1941.

### Articles

Clausen, Bernard C. An Adventure in Defeating Divorce. Journal of Social Hygiene. March, 1934.

Fuast, Floyd. The Church and the New Homes. Article, The Christian Evangelist, February, 1941. St. Louis: Christian Board of Publication.

Lentz, Richard. The Church Helps the Home. Article, Bethany Church School Guide, February, 1941. St. Louis: Christian Board of Publication.

## APPENDIXES

### I. A Select Book List: For the Christian Education of Parents.

- Chalmers, Mary E. The Home Beautiful. Philadelphia: Judson Press. (Twenty-five lessons based on Biblical material with valuable references to modern literature and comments on problems of family life).
- Fiske, George Walter. Problems of Christian Family Life Today Westminister Press, 1934.
- Hayward, Percy R., and Myrtle H. The Home and Christian Living Westminister Press, 1931
- Overton, Grace Sloan. The Home in a Changing Culture. New York: Revell Co., 1935.
- Wood, Leland Foster. Growing Together in the Family. New York: Abingdon Press, 1935.

### II. A Select Book List: For Young People.

- Burkhart, Roy A. From Friendship to Marriage. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1937. (A useful source book with question for discussion).
- Burkhart, Roy A. Thinking About Marriage. New York: Association Press, 1934. (A useful outline for study and discussion in youth groups)
- Dalberg, Edwin T. Youth and the Homes of Tomorrow. Judson Press, 1934.
- Dickerson, Roy E. So Youth May Know. New York: Association Press, 1930. (A good treatment of the Christian attitude toward sex, courtship, engagement and marriage).
- Ideal of Love and Marriage. The Federal Council of Churches, 297 Fourth Ave., New York.